真・天地無用！魎皇鬼外伝

天地無用！GXP 18 簾座編

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ファンタジア文庫

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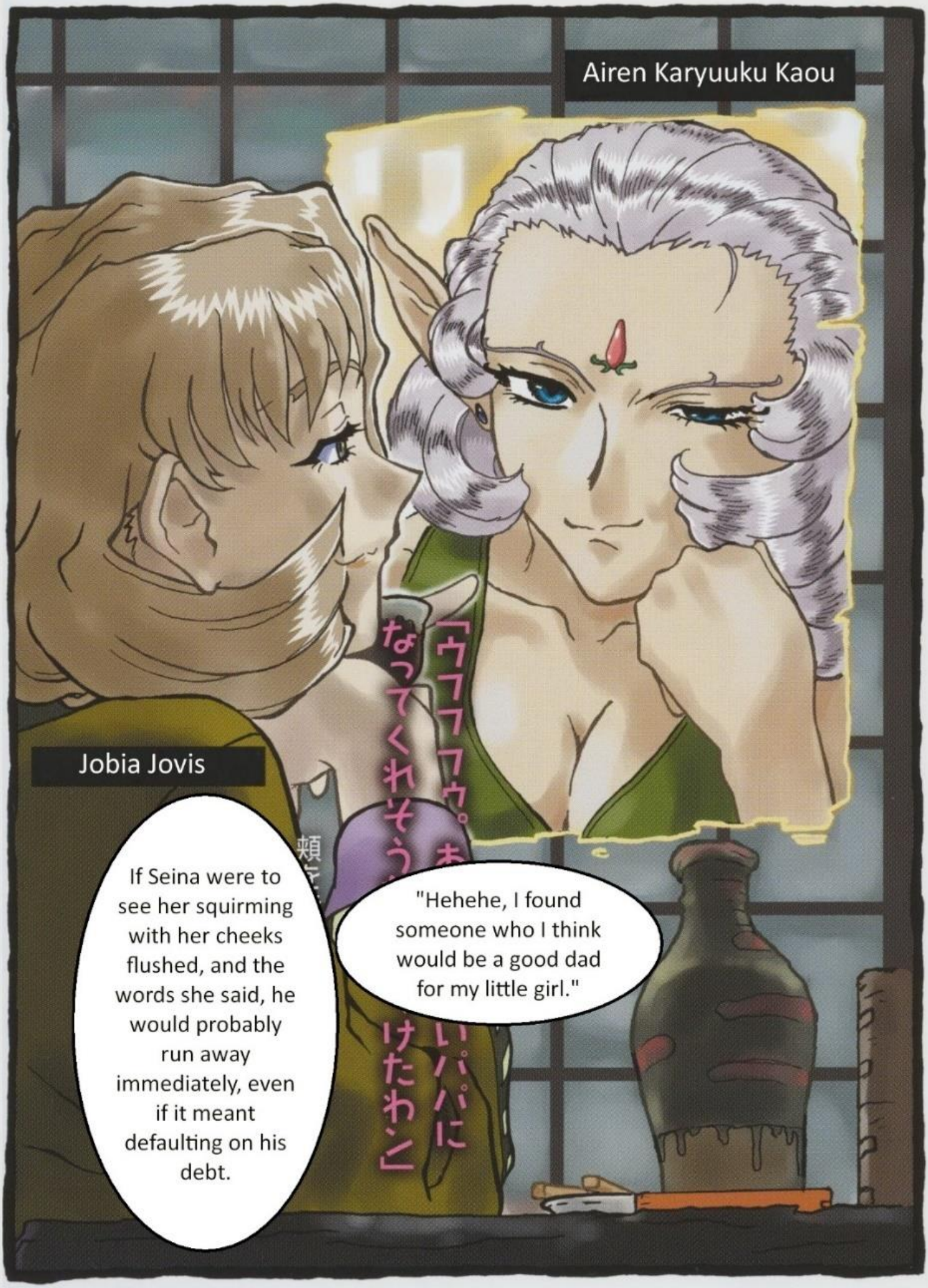
Liberta
「……リベル様？」
"...Liberta-sama?"
クイズがある方向に視線を移した瞬間、レーター女性に気付いて驚きに目を見開いた。
The moment Kuis looked over, she noticed a female operator and her eyes widened in surprise.
Kuis Panta

Kiriko's words brought the excitement of those gathered there to a climax.
Masaki Kiriko
Ryoko Balta
Amane Kaunaq
Neeju na Melmas
"I do not demand your allegiance! I do not care who you are or where you come from! All who gather here and choose to stay here will have a chance! Come, all of you who have gathered here. Win the throne with your strength and your party!"
Kirche
D
Souren Karyuuku Kaou
Miki Steinbeck


Airen Karyuuku Kaou
「ウフフフ。
なってくれそう
いパパに
けたわ」
Jobia Jovis
If Seina were to see her squirming with her cheeks flushed, and the words she said, he would probably run away immediately, even if it meant defaulting on his debt.
"Hehehe, I found someone who I think would be a good dad for my little girl."

True Tenchi Muyo! Ryo-Ohki Side Story

Tenchi Muyo! GXP18

Masaki Kajishima / Hideki Shirane

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Chapter One: Cool Down

Racepshi, the pleasure planet, was a place that offered all kinds of entertainment day and night, a garden of pleasure, a paradise, a place that has been called a heaven on earth.

You'll never be bored here -- or that's how it should be.

“.....sigh”

Normally, this place would be filled with the clamor of crowds, but instead, deep sighs echoed from every corner.

“....Whew.”

The men and women gathered there all sighed loudly, having ordered drinks but lacking the energy to take a sip, as time passed and the ice in their glasses melted away. The empty shells of the customers who ruined many cocktails in this way seemed to have a serious case of May blues after a long holiday. The cause of this was the sudden duel between the legendary armored gods and the duel between Masaki Kiriko and the second heirs of Renza the other day.

For members of the Galactic Federation, it wasn't that big of a deal, but for Renza, those duels were events of legend and miracles. Preparing an event to further fuel such fervor would be no easy task, even for Racepshi. Though these hollowed-out individuals made up only about thirty percent of the crowd, they were more than enough to dampen the atmosphere on Racepshi.

Of course, Racepshi wouldn't just leave things as they were. However, as the saying goes, 'Hunger is the best seasoning', and no matter how delicious a meal was, its flavor and enjoyment were halved when you were already full. That's why Racepshi deliberately used its standard program to cool down customers' excitement. And when the cool-down period was over, they were in the midst of training and developing new programs at a rapid pace to satisfy their customers.

X X X

Mabashi Hall - named after a member of the Jurai Royal Family, this facility was one of the ten largest theater halls in Racepshi, with a long history and tradition, and where many legendary performances have taken place. This hall, along with the other nine, was considered among the best in Racepshi, having repeatedly served as a catalyst for enhancing Racepshi's reputation. It was now anticipated to act as a catalyst to swiftly dispel the lethargy that was likely to prevail following the cool-down period. Naturally, in response to these expectations, preparations for major events centered around each hall were progressing steadily.

“.....”

Maya was walking at a brisk pace, glancing at the scene below through the windows of a hidden passageway used by Maihime and other high-ranking officials. The Grand Theatre Hall had many ancillary facilities, including the Maihime sponsor salon, which could be seen below.

The social circles of the dancers naturally varied depending on the clientele present, but one could also observe various external factors beyond Racepshi. In particular, the relocation of Racepshi's base of operations to Renza, along with the duel-related events involving Seina, had significantly altered the clientele. As for the Maiko class, they could generally discern the organizational affiliations and roles of customers at a glance, and information was shared among the Maiko. Of course, as long as customers did not deviate from their role as customers, the Maiko did not pry into their backgrounds and generally turned a blind eye.

Maya, satisfied, looked away from the salon hall and entered a transfer gate. She was headed for a nearby rehearsal hall. As she had expected, it was the break time between lessons, and while many staff members were working, the Maiko were taking a rest.

“Thank you for your hard work, Mami-nee-sama.”

Maya stopped an attendant, took the metal cup she was carrying, and approached her sister, who was sitting on a bench wiping off her sweat. She had short hair and a beautiful ballet dancer's figure and was a woman who looked more like her father than like a Maiko.

“Here you go.”

She gave her sister a metal cup.

“Oh, thank you.”

“As usual, it seems like you get a lot of pirate... no, Free Alliance customers at your place, Mami-nee-sama.”

“But it's fewer than the customers from Renza’s intelligence organizations.”

At the Maihime rank in Racepshi, each had a high-ranking patron who acted as their sponsor, and through their connections, various information came to them. As for Makihi's daughters, their information rank was quite high, and each had their own specialized information channels. Mami, for example, had connections with pirates

in the Renza sector. As a result, she also had ties with the Renzan intelligence networks...

“But I still don't have the information that Maya wants.”

“We still don't know where Seina-sama is...”

“The remains of the marked exterior were found early on, but there seem to be no clues... There are no forces showing unusual movements, so it's certain that no one has found him yet. Well, realistically speaking, from Seina-sama's perspective, in a space where it's unclear who is friend or foe, it's only natural to choose to remain hidden for the time being.”

“I agree……”

Maya took a deep breath to calm herself.

“.....By the way, has there been any news from the Freedom Alliance .....regarding that incident?”

“They've got their pride, so they can't come crying to us. They seem to have countermeasures ready, so they're probably just enjoying watching you fall into their trap. Heh heh, I bet it'll be a while before you realize there's a problem.”

“Is everything okay, sister?”

“The unscrupulous people who are trying to point the blame at us are being dealt with...”

Mami looked at the shadow standing behind the curtain.

“……I see”

Maya glanced at the person, then returned her attention to her sister. At the same time, that person also disappeared as if melting into the darkness beyond.

“... More importantly, I'd like to ask you for a small favor in return for the information.”

Mami waited until there was no sign of the person and then said, “Anything you want.”

“Thank you. I'd like you to introduce an acquaintance to that princess you mentioned.”

Kiriko was currently recruiting people related to Renza. However, they did not accept general applications, so they were looking for connections. Gathering information was the price of such favors.

“Is just an introduction sufficient?”

Mami's acquaintance was undoubtedly someone connected to the pirates, but if the reward was information about Seina, then a recommendation rather than an introduction was possible. Naturally, if Maya recommended them, Kiriko would not be able to refuse, and they would definitely be hired. However, if it was just an introduction, then it would be up to Kiriko to decide whether or not to hire them.

“Yes.”

Mami nodded with a smile.

“Understood.”

The bottom line was that they would ask for something in the future, but under the current circumstances, it was natural for them to keep it as a trump card. In any case, Maya and her team were only trying to make connections, and the rest was up to the other party.

“Thank you... Well, that's all for now. Let's just focus on what we need to do here.”

“Haha... I agree. Mother and almost all of our sisters will be gathered together at this major reboot event, so it would be a real problem if we screwed it up.”

What was important to them was that their requests were listened to, their value as dancers, and the improvement of their abilities. After the break, practice resumed, and the noise returned to the entire hall.

After seeing Mami return to training, Maya quickly left the hall to start her own practice.

Chapter Two: Old Friends

The person who had disappeared from the wings of the stage was moving through a dimly lit dome-shaped corridor. People who appeared to be theater staff occasionally passed by, but they also passed by without even looking at the woman, as if she wasn't even there. However, since this was a major backstage artery used by staff involved in hundreds of events, and was sometimes used by tens of thousands of people, it wasn't like everyone knew each other. Of course, there were thorough biometric checks, so there was no room for suspicious people to sneak in, so there was no need to worry if the woman seemed to be a stranger.

The large hallway had many branches off of it, making it look like a maze. However, the woman didn't get lost and took a small side passage. At the end of the passage was a nondescript elevator door, and when she placed her hand on the authentication plate next to it, the door promptly opened.

As soon as she entered, the doors closed, and the elevator began to descend. After a few seconds, the walls at the back and both ends became transparent, projecting the view outside. The elevator was currently descending through one of the central pillars that ran through Racepshi from the surface to the Core Unit, offering a panoramic view of each floor. Just being able to see this view would be an event in itself, and the speed at which she descended through this breathtaking scenery made it feel like she was in free fall. Currently, the elevator was under inertial control, so her body did not float up, and there was no discomfort when descending.

Because the levels are not simply divided, some of the planet-scale vessels had extraordinary, vaulted structures and levels that could be hundreds of kilometers long. The landscape also had a variety of landscapes, from a completely urbanized level to a level filled with water to a jungle-like level overflowing with nature. Racepshi was self-sufficient in terms of staff, especially during their long journeys. Naturally, there were food production plants for this purpose, which were also a part of the landscape. Passing through each level, the elevator in which the woman rode descended to an old-fashioned, cluttered, and spliced-together building complex that seemed to be illegally constructed.

Although she was wearing an outfit that would be more suitable for a luxury hotel or office, her destination seemed to be that floor, and as the elevator approached the surface of the floor, its speed slowed. The destination was a place that could be considered a ruin, but as she got closer, she could see the many illuminated monitor signs and the hustle and bustle and excitement of the many people passing by, and she realized that it was a livelier place than the previous floors. But that was no surprise, as this floor was where the passionate fans of Racepshi gathered, regardless of age or gender, rich or poor. It was a place that was truly Racepshi-like.

The elevator, which had been projecting the view outside, returned to the same opaque wall as before and slowly came to a halt.

“Hmph.”

Even though the door behind her had opened, the woman continued facing the wall and sighed, as if reluctant to say goodbye to the magnificent view she had just seen. Then she shook off that feeling, turned briskly and headed out the door.

Surprisingly, she emerged into a simple, narrow corridor. It was decorated in chic colors, with only a few subtle elements, and was reasonably neat and clean, unlike the old building outside. The woman walked quickly down the passageway. Of course, it was not just a passageway; there were more than a thousand different security scans before she reached the end of the corridor, about 10 meters ahead. Passing through all of them without any difficulty, the woman arrived at the final transfer gate. She was then transferred to her final destination with a specially issued pass and biometric identification.

“Phew.”

The place she was transferred to was in stark contrast to the simplicity she had felt up until then, with high ceilings and a high-quality interior that resembled a high-end hotel room.

“We've been waiting for you.”

Five women greeted Kuis with a bow. All of them were wearing clothing similar to the Indian Kurta, but each had different designs and colors because they served different masters. They had the air of Juraian warriors rather than maids, and it was clear that they had skills

comparable to those of Seto's ladies-in-waiting. Nevertheless, she was familiar with the women, and the atmosphere was friendly.

“Thank you.”

Kuis smiled without reservation and continued to the back of the room. A magnificent relief that served as both a barrier and a gateway, probably inspired by the history of Renza, rattled open in front of her. Passing through the gate and opening a thin curtain, she could hear the hustle and bustle inside.

“.....”

There, a scene unfolded that was a little different from the impression one got from the outside.

In front of her were about ten maids and their upper-class ladies, who were likely their masters, relaxing on sofas. Drinks and snacks were laid out on a wide table, making it seem like a buffet. On the far wall was a surveillance video of various parts of Racepshi, making it truly bizarre.

“Kuis-sama!”

Then, the women sitting on the sofa saw Kuis and stood up, running over with big smiles on their faces. All of them seemed to be around Kuis' age.

I am honored to meet you, Your Royal Highnesses.

The Royal Highnesses that Kuis greeted were the legitimate wives of the heads of Renza’s five royal families. The fact that someone in such a position was present in this remote location, even if it was for camouflage purposes, was indicative of the peculiar nature of Racepshi.

“There's no need for formal greetings between us anymore.”

“That's right. Without Seto-sama's support and guidance, we wouldn't be where we are today.”

The warm and cozy scene reminded her of a reunion of a prestigious women's college being held for the first time in over a decade. However, the women gathered there were undoubtedly the first ladies of Renza.

“I never imagined that I would meet you in person so soon.”

“The earliest planned date is still three hundred years away.”

“Even though I had received detailed reports and data from Kuis, I honestly couldn't believe that a single person could cause such a phenomenon...”

She turned her attention to the monitor. For just that moment, their stern gazes offered a glimpse of their true nature. However, looking at the data showing Seina and his teams' actions since they came to Renza and the resulting data, it was only natural. Although they couldn't see them from where Kuis was when she entered the room, there were many female operators standing one step lower, making it seem just like a room in an intelligence bureau. The only difference was that everyone was wearing plain clothes instead of uniforms...

"Oh!"

"Looking at this situation, I have no choice but to accept that what happened over there is true."

"As long as we can't make this data public, no one else is going to believe it."

Queen Suiten laughed and breathed a deep sigh.

"Yes, I understand your feelings. My girls (intel team) checked and verified it over and over again, but they still couldn't believe it and even underwent psychiatric evaluations."

Unfortunately, the more conscientious a person was, the stronger this tendency was, and they struggled to accept the reality in front of them. However, after the bubble economy hit, Seto's Intelligence Department was no longer suffering from chronic financial difficulties, and they were able to easily accept this as a fact of life.

"Same here."

The five Queens turned towards their operators and smirked.

"Liberta-sama?"

Kuis was attracted by the expressions of five Queen's gaze, and as she looked at the operators, she noticed one of them, a woman, and her face contorted in surprise. It was a rare look of shock for Kuis.

"It wouldn't be fair if we were the ones being surprised all the time... don't' you think?"

Seeing this, the Queens smiled with satisfaction.

"...Yeah, well, I'm surprised."

Kuis breathed a big sigh and managed to smile. After all, the person sitting in the operator's seat was none other than Dr. Clay's mother.

"Oh my goodness, Kuis-chan, I'm glad to hear you're doing well♡"

The beautiful woman who slowly approached with a smile was, contrary to her appearance, over 20,000 years old, just like Clay and Washu. Naturally, she was the oldest woman known to the Galactic Federation at this point. Needless to say, this was a product of Clay's scientific

prowess. She was one of the women who possessed the highest level of technology in the Galaxy Academy.

“I believe you were developing planetary systems outside of the Alliance's territory, but maybe you've grown tired of it?”

“Well, those kids are strong enough to stand on their own now, so I don't need to keep interfering with them.”

“Well... that's certainly true.”

Liberta was a genius at finding talented people. After that, she simply pointed out the direction in which those people could bring out their talents, giving them a hands-off approach to development. And she had been successful in all of them. It was only thanks to her that Dr. Clay was able to develop his talent as a philosopher, and the same was true for Kuis' recent border planet development; it was just a result of her raising a child she had a connection with and found intriguing, and it developed into that type of business.

--Really this person...

Kuis sighed deeply in her heart and ruminated on Liberta's past as if to sort out her feelings.

Clay's father was a local lord on a certain planet. His family was an ancient and prestigious family, but with each generation it had fallen into decline, and by the time he inherited it had been transferred to a vast but deserted and remote territory.

Clay's father himself was an ordinary man, and did his best just to maintain the family's status. However, the situation changed drastically when he took Liberta as a concubine. It all started when Clay's father, who was in financial difficulty, asked Liberta's family, a merchant, for a loan. Her family was originally a small merchant house but had grown rapidly thanks to Liberta's skills.

(...Power and money. Well, that's a common story.)

The merchant family had many enemies due to their rapid expansion, but they had authority, so they sent Liberta as a concubine to Clay's father, who was having trouble paying off his debts. As a result, Liberta's talent for nurturing was put to good use, and the growth of the next generation of young retainers was particularly remarkable, and eventually their territory expanded to cover the entire continent.

(Whether this was a good thing or a bad thing ..... depended on one's opinion.)

However, Liberta had a bad habit. She got bored just when the cultivation was starting to get on track. She didn't rest on her laurels and abandoned the harvest that would have been obtained continuously from the cultivation.

As his territory expanded and his power reached its peak, Clay's father, had many wives through arranged marriages, and the power struggles were intensifying. Liberta's family, a

merchant family, had also grown large enough to form ties with other powerful people, so there was little benefit to having his daughter as Clay's father's wife. So in exchange for giving up the power of her connections, Liberta received a large amount of money, divorced her husband, and left the country, ostensibly in exile. After that, she came to visit her only son, Clay.

(That's when Naja found out about Liberta... that was intense.)

Liberta came to see Clay, but he was reluctant, so she dragged him along and happily made the rounds to greet all of Clay's associates, which was the most embarrassing thing she could do for her son. What's more, when Liberta found out Clay's nickname, “Oh, that's not a good name.”

She said with a smile. The contrast between mother and son at that moment was so stark that even Washu and Naja were unsure of how to react. Of course, the others sympathized with Clay on this matter.

--Just as we would expect from our Mama! She calmly accomplishes things we can't do.

There was a fearless idiot who gleefully brought up the topic and teased him, but sure enough, Clay, completely pissed off, unleashed his philosopher's powers and exposed the idiot's embarrassing information, which spread to those around and eventually involved not only those involved but even unrelated people, escalating into the first great war of embarrassing information exposure.

Eventually, professors from the philosophy department were called in to try and calm the situation, but the situation continued to deteriorate as they were unable to stop Clay's obsession, who was raging and had lost all sense of reason, let alone locate him in hiding.

(Clay was like a man possessed in his quest for revenge, wasn't he? Well, the professors were sympathetic to Clay, and I'm sure they weren't too serious, partly because they were amused.....)

Eventually, everyone was at their wits' end and thought they'd just have to leave Clay alone until he got tired of it, but just as they were about to give up, Liberta, who seemed to be equipped with a special octopus radar, easily captured Clay and dragged him on a pilgrimage of apologies.

As a result, Clay was forced to undergo even more humiliation, but fearing the outbreak of a second war of exposure, any talk of Liberta became untouchable at the Academy thereafter.

Incidentally, the idiot who started it all was quickly exposed, ass and all, and he became mentally ill and shut himself away in his room, which was separated from the rest of the facility. He was then sent back to his hometown in a fresh meat package. Of course, no one felt sorry for him.

X X X

Fortunately, after that incident, Liberta never showed up at any places related to Clay...

(However, that didn't mean that Clay's troubles had ended.)

So what was Liberta doing? At the time, she was devoting herself to another hobby: collecting art. The funds for this came initially from her own personal funds, but those eventually ran out and she received a donation from Clay.

It was not uncommon for the family of a philosopher to depend on the philosopher's income. But in Liberta's case, it was quite extreme, as the amount was half of Clay's earnings. Liberta limited the amount to half and did not ask for more, but it was still a bit excessive for a hobby.

(I'm sure that was also a factor in Clay's greed for money...and...)

Kuis couldn't help but laugh.

The establishment of MMD for philosophy students was also due in part to Liberta's spending.

In any case, with Clay's wealth as a backing, Liberta used her abundant funds to buy up art, crafts, and antiques of all genres. It was enough to become the talk of the town in neighboring countries.

However, while this may sound like the extravagance of a nouveau riche, Liberta was a gifted woman who recognized Clay's talent, nurtured it, and helped him enter the philosophy department, the highest level of academia at the time. On the surface, the items she bought without regard for authenticity, having been manipulated by many art dealers, were actually just items she recognized as having some value in.

(Now that I think about it, they were pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.)

Even items by unknown artists or antiques that seemed like nothing more than junk could sometimes become incredibly valuable due to the discovery of new historical facts and changes in values over time.

In the case of forgeries and copies, there were cases where the artists who made them were highly regarded, and in some cases, the originals were stolen or lost due to war damage, so the forgeries could become historical materials despite being fakes. Moreover, Liberta's collection history to date spanned about 20,000 years, so there was a solid academic lineage accumulated there. Furthermore, her natural ability, training skills, had influenced the dealers who sold art to her.

In the process of searching for products to sell to Liberta, the dealers unconsciously learned her preferences and unknowingly developed their eye for art. As a result, many talents were discovered and nurtured, which contributed greatly to the development of art-related fields. Her name was even included in the art history books of later generations.

In addition to her body, which was the culmination of Clay's scientific knowledge, Liberta also possessed another ship. It was a legendary ship that was said to be on par with Jurai's “Imperial Ship” and Washu's “Ryo-Ohki”. Of course, since the concept of the ship was different, it was inferior in terms of simple power and fighting ability, but there was no doubt that it was a masterpiece ship that brought together the best of the philosopher's abilities.

Above all, the ship housed a capital city-sized collection of art works collected by Liberta, which were neatly organized and displayed, and were regularly open to the public. Even without visiting the ship in person, it was possible to view the art works at any time by linking with a special force field. Although the pieces not on display were not available for loan, precise scan data could be viewed upon request, so the ship eventually came to be known as a “Museum”, and that was now its official name. As a result, it was certain that the ship surpassed all others in terms of its great contributions to both academic and cultural fields.

However, this essentially made the value of the treasures stored there public, and so it was inevitable that such a treasure ship, along with its owner, would become a target for thieves to attack. However, Clay's masterpiece ship, the “Museum”, has been able to repel all threats thanks to its incredible security technology and fighting power.

As an aside, although Liberta was not as successful as Seina in terms of the number of pirate kills in a short period of time, she was by far the leader in terms of total number. Well, in that respect, she was also contributing to public safety.

(...Ah, now that I think about it, I once had my girls, without revealing their names, look into the data on Liberta's business ventures...)

The simulation was based on what would happen if Liberta had remained the owner of a company that she had helped develop.

As a result, the ladies-in-waiting went to Seto,

“Can't you somehow scout that person? Please! Please!”

They even went to Seto in tears with a direct appeal.

After all, calculations showed that it would become a conglomerate company larger than Jurai, and Liberta's projected personal assets showed the potential to even support Jurai's military budget, so this was only natural.

(If only she didn't get so bored...)

However, that didn't mean all of them were a waste of money.

Seto’s ladies verified the numbers, and just like with art, her extravagance had contributed greatly to the development and economic revitalization of the Galaxy Federation as a whole.

And because of this, the misdeeds of Dr. Clay, who was as outstanding as Washu among the philosophers, were overlooked.

“...By the way, it seems your son is here too.”

Kuis whispered softly, checking Liberta's expression. Well, for Kuis, it was a bit of revenge for being surprised. It was also the moment she became convinced of the existence of the Octopus Radar.

“It seems so. Well, we're not old enough to be parent and child anymore, so it's not like we could meet and talk.”

“But that doesn't mean you've cut ties, right?”

She still spent half of Clay's earnings every year, and even now she still received technological upgrades for her ship and body. The fact that she had such a strong bond with the greedy Clay was something only a mother and son could do.

“He still has his original face, doesn’t he? He looks a lot like your husband...”

The husband, of course, was Clay's biological father, whom she had long since divorced and was now deceased.

“There are probably a lot of people like that depending on the era.”

Just as common sense and ways of thinking changed with the times and countries, body modification also went in and out of fashion. Some people did not approve of changing the face they inherited from their parents.

“That child looks just like his father, but that's just a way of spiting me. After all, he loved his father very much.”

Liberta was smiling broadly. Even the notoriously arrogant philosopher would be no match for his mother, no matter how many thousands of years had passed.

“.....”

Kuis stared at Liberta as if she were a monster.

It wasn’t every day you saw or heard someone treat Clay like a daddy's boy, and since it was a normal conversation between a mother and son, it was no wonder that Kuis's brain couldn’t process it. It seems that what was meant to be a little bit of revenge turned out to be a real disaster.

“...I see.”

Kuis nodded along to what she was saying, while quickly refueling with some snacks and juice to get her sugar levels up and energize her brain.

“You've been doing whatever you want here and there for a while now, don't you think it's time to settle down?”

“Well, yeah...”

Liberta was definitely plotting something. The fact that she was even here was part of that plan. She was watching the image of Clay and his companion on the monitor.

(I don't want to know! I don't want to think about it! Don't even think about it!)

Kuis pushed that fact to the back of her mind. Any further conversation would seriously backfire, and the reason she'd come here in the first place was to exchange information with Renzan Queens, not to perform some dangerous comedy routine with Liberta.

“Ufufufu♡”

However, it seemed to be very popular with the Queens who were watching...

“Um... it’s about time.”

“That's right. Now that I've had the chance to say hello to Kuis-dono, I will be off.”

Perhaps Liberta had read Kuis's expression, or perhaps she felt that her role of surprising her was over, or perhaps she had simply grown bored, as she waved goodbye to the Renzan Queens and hurried to the exit. It was as if they were old friends, and the Queens waved goodbye to her with a smile.

(Although the Queens are not the types to show off their authority in this situation...)

If you thought about it, this was probably the first time Liberta and the Renzan Queens met. Even though they knew what kind of position each other held, it was impossible for them to be this comfortable. However, this was Liberta's training skill, her talent for deceiving people.

(If it will contribute to the future development of Renza...)

The information shared by the alliance about the Liberta effect was likely something the Renzan Queens were hoping for. There was no harm in becoming friends with her.

“Now, let's get back to the main topic.”

With no sign of Liberta around, the entertainment was over for the time being, and although the damage was greater than expected, Kuis had somehow managed to regain her composure.

Kuis and the Queens sat on the sofa within view of the monitor, and the relaxed atmosphere that had been there until then suddenly changed to one that was more like a summit meeting.

“Now then, Kuis-sama... first of all, I would like to thank you once again for your assistance to our party. Without your help, and Seto-sama’s, our husbands would not have been able to become kings.”

The five of them all bowed to Kuis at once, and Kuis returned it with a small bow.

“...and this time, the existence of Yamada Seina is accelerating the pace.”

“We are constantly being influenced by it. How pathetic.”

“Yes. As a result, the barriers between us will undoubtedly be removed in the not-too-distant future.”

“But that's too early. Our organization won't be ready yet.”

“Once the Galactic Federation's system is in order, I don't think this will have any further impact on us.”

Various important people were reflected on the monitor. The technology provided by Seto was for intelligence gathering and highly accurate prediction. With the help of Yamada Seina and Washu's schemes, the accuracy had increased even further. The possible outcomes that could be obtained from this were...

“What do you think Jurai is thinking?”

Whatever the general opinion of the Galactic Federation, Jurai would have the greatest influence on Renza. The Brain Tree of the Armored Cavalry was the backbone of Renza's power, and if Jurai, who possessed higher-level trees, got serious, even the five Renzan Queens would have almost no political influence. That's where Seto and her “Old Hag Club” came into play. Here, there were no political or formal concerns, and the women could freely speak their minds. This made it a refuge for those who lost in politics.

“As I’ve said before, our final goal is to establish a new alliance, but as you’ve all said, it is true that the situation is progressing too quickly. In order to balance the power of the Galactic Federation, we are rushing to reorganize our former pirate organizations.”

“Hmm... Jurai has no intention of becoming a dictator, you say?”

“We don't want to put our precious friends in any kind of trouble.”

The Imperial Family's ships were still subject to many restrictions on their movements. If Renza and Jurai were carelessly linked together, they would end up making the Galactic Federation their enemy.

“If we just take control of everything, that problem will be solved, right?”

“Those kids hate fighting.”

“Hmm? But aren't the people of Jurai a warrior race?”

“It's not like we’re just going to accept anyone.”

If they were muscle-brained battle maniacs, they would never have become friends with Tsunami in the first place.

“Hohoho, but your princess is quite something.”

The Renzan Queens turned to the monitor where the Kiriko duel scene was being shown. Of course, this was for the purpose of analyzing it from Renza's point of view and coming up with countermeasures, but Kuis was well aware of this and was laughing.

“It's embarrassing to say, but when it comes to matters concerning Seina-dono, that's how it goes...”

To be honest, it was not very praiseworthy that Kiriko took out her anger at their ridicule of Seina and challenged them to a duel with the unfamiliar Sacred Mechalord in the heat of the moment, as a training exercise. Kuis would have liked for Kiriko to respond cleverly as the leader of Seina's army of wives. While the beginning of the battle was poor from a veteran fighter's point of view, Kiriko's ability to adjust to and master Washu's peculiar mount in no time with her abundant experience in actual battle and her operative ability was indeed impressive. It was a double whammy.

“That impulsiveness may also be due to a change from Seina's probability vector.”

“Heh heh heh... Considering the mission I gave Seina-dono, those feelings are an important factor.”

A decoy unit. If the goal was to attract attention and draw the enemy in, Kiriko's impulsiveness would act as the driving force that would lead to a resolution. Seina drew them in, and Kiriko and the girls would crush them.

“I wish she'd behave rationally.”

“Kakaka! That is one of the privileges of youth. Isn't it cute? I like it.”

“Even so, things have suddenly become a lot more active around the princess.”

As they stared at the monitor, they felt a sense of awe at the data and situation displayed there. They were the five Renzan Queens at the top of the Renza Alliance's political hierarchy. That alone was proof of Seina's extraordinary power.

“However... while my vision has improved, it is quite difficult to pretend that I don't know anything.”

Even if they knew that those on their side were enemies, they pretended not to know. It would be one thing if it was just themselves, but sometimes they had to abandon their family and friends to death. Even though they could have helped them. But as they were in

charge of national politics, they could not lose the advantage of having unilateral information.

“It may seem tempting to resort to force, but the only way to prevent genocide is to use your strength effectively.”

Once they started something, they could end up eliminating anyone who seemed even the slightest bit hostile. If they didn't do anything half-heartedly and the enemy became wary, the information would be worthless. If the clear view became cloudy again, it would just be a fight in the dark.

“That's why we have Seina-dono. He is exceptionally capable in that regard.”

Even if the opponent knew a certain amount of information and was wary, he could instantly attract the true nature of his enemy. That was Seina's special power. The reason Kuis came here was to provide them with the know-how to use Seina.

“That's a pity though.”

“That's why we're providing them with excellent personnel and equipment.”

“Yes, and I also recommend it for human resource development. You'll be amazed at how much they grow.”

The troubles that followed were so surprising that the experience gained by those involved with Seina was incredible. In fact, Kiriko and her team’s combat experience had easily surpassed that of even the most experienced veterans in just a few years.

“I see... that princess is a good example of that.”

“Yes, we also need to be prepared for a lot of things...”

In addition to Kiriko, other good examples close to Kuis included people like Ringo in the accounting department. While their growth was welcome, it was not uncommon for them to be used as errand boys despite being on the receiving end, and they were often caught out by malicious schemes and made to sit in seiza. Well, I guess you could say it's a mixed blessing. **(TN: In America, we would say, “sitting on your heels”. It’s very uncomfortable.)**

“Ho-ho-ho, that's an extravagant problem, isn't it?”

On the monitor was some interesting footage provided by Ringo... it also showed Seto and the others sitting in seiza position.

Chapter Three: At the Bottom of the Abyss

(How did this happen...?)

Mahaku Takuma, the next representative of Mahakuten, was dripping with cold sweat as he met with Masaki Kiriko.

(You're skipping steps too fast. Even I need time to prepare myself. This is terrible, terrible, terrible!)

Standing behind Takuma as his attendant, the old woman who caused this meeting was watching the scene with a broad smile. Takuma would have liked to complain to her, but he couldn't take his eyes off Kiriko. It was just like “an ancient dragon in front and a demon behind”. Yes, this was how Takuma felt, that she was far more frightening than tigers and wolves.

(This is way too much, old woman!)

It was a few days ago, when Takuma attended the Santen Conference dressed as a woman.

Bang!

While Takuma was lost in thought about Seina, and his sisters were having wild fantasies in the reception room, his former nanny suddenly burst into the room.

“”””!!”””

Everyone froze upon seeing the person they least wanted to see in this situation. Imagine that Ringo, with horns and a fierce expression on her face, had caught Seto as she was sneaking around doing some mischief.

“Excuse me, this is an emergency.”

With that said, the old lady grabbed Takuma by the collar and casually strolled out of the representative's office.

“Na... Nanny! This isn't what it looks like! You've got the wrong idea, I swear!”

“.....”

Takuma's excuses were in vain, and the old woman walked silently and gracefully, gliding towards the teleportation gate in the waiting room. Their destination was the Administrative Department used by the old woman.

“N-nanny?”

Without saying a word, the old woman had the confused Takuma stand facing a wall and stood behind him.

“Sorry to keep you waiting.”

The moment the room was enveloped in the secret wall, Takuma was shocked and turned around to say something to the old woman, but she grabbed him by the shoulders with incredible strength and turned him to face her. Takuma couldn't move at all with both of his arms tightly gripped in her hands.

(I have a bad feeling about this)

Although the old woman sometimes behaved in a slightly outlandish way towards Takuma, she was usually calm and reserved. However, she had acted forcefully like this a few times before. All of them were...

“It's been a while, Takuma. You've grown so beautiful.”

All of those cases were related to King Magiyoku. The person shown on the monitor was Gyokuren, the current King Magiyoku herself.

“!!”

Takuma immediately tried to kneel, but the old woman still had a hold on his shoulders, so he couldn't move. It was disrespectful to stand in front of the king.

“Hey, old woman!”

“Oh, I don't mind.”

She spoke in a friendly manner, but in contrast, even through the monitor, her smile was intimidating.

Those who became kings of Magiyoku were different. Even Takuma, who belonged to the privileged class, seemed somewhat strange to the general public. The kings of Magiyoku, who were at the top of the hierarchy, were even more so. Even through a monitor, facing them was mentally exhausting. That is why he wanted to kneel and avoid her gaze.

(I had heard the rumors though...)

The rumor was that Gyokuren, who was previously surrounded by raw, malevolent aura, was now able to control it.

(But... I'm not kidding.)

If you met her face to face, you could see that her true nature remained unchanged. In fact, the malevolence contained within her had grown to a level that was incomparable to what it was before.

“Takuma. Please meet with Masaki Kiriko-sama.”

The moment she said that, Racepshi gave permission to use the teleport gate. In other words, he had to go immediately.

“Eh?! But...”

“I'm counting on you.”

“I understand, Masui-sama.”

The old woman bowed respectfully, and Takuma was released from her grip. As soon as the call was cut off, Takuma, mentally exhausted, collapsed on the spot, drenched in sweat.

“Well then, Takuma-sama, we will be leaving immediately.”

“Wait a minute! I know it's urgent, but at least let me get changed!”

“But this suits you so well, as your nanny it's my biggest mistake in life that I failed to notice that you feel this way on the inside.”

“No, no! It's a misunderstanding!”

It seemed that the nightmare that Takuma had been afraid of had become reality. He desperately tried to explain himself, but he knew it was no use. But he still had to do something this time.

“This was just a prank by my sisters!”

“Hohoho, it's fine. Leave it all to me.”

“Listen, listen! Please!”

“Hohohoho.”

The old woman, who was completely deaf to reason, demonstrated her competence and made an appointment to meet Kiriko upon arriving at Racepshi via the transfer gate a few minutes later, and with Gyokuren's prior arrangements, he was able to meet with Kiriko a few minutes after that. Of course, he had fixed his smudged makeup.

X X X

Seina's unused mansion in Kamidake’s residential district was currently being used as Kiriko's office and guest house. Takuma and the old woman were led to the largest meeting room there. It had been less than an hour since they had communicated with Gyokuren.

“That's why it's different! This is...”

While waiting for Kiriko to arrive, Takuma tried to persuade the old woman. Although the other party already had two ladies-in-waiting, the future looked bleak at this rate.

“Hohoho.”

“It's like banging your head against the wall”- that's how conversations with the old woman always went. Lately, he'd started to think that this was just another twisted characteristic of Magiyoku, that she was just being spiteful...

“But I'm sure Takuma-sama said that he was interested in Yamada Seina-sama, right?”

“Sorry to keep you waiting...huh?”

Kiriko entered the room at the worst possible time and froze when she heard the old woman's words and saw Takuma’s face, now dressed as a woman. The old woman had said the worst possible words at the worst possible time.

“.....”

(Oh no, she looks confused... ugh!)

The moment he looked into Kiriko's eyes, Takuma realized what Kiriko's true nature was, and why the Witch Queen Gyokuren had learned to control herself over there.

(Oh, I might be dead.)

X X X

“I see, that's how it is.” Kiriko said with a gentle smile. It was hard to believe that this was the same person as before.

“Yes, I'm sorry for causing so many misunderstandings.”

Anyway, Takuma got down on his knees and pleaded with Kiriko.

--It was just a prank.

Even if it meant exposing the scandal of the old woman's jumping to conclusions and assumptions, and his sisters' pranks, and incurring their wrath, and at worst making them his enemy, it was far better than making an enemy of Kiriko, who harbored the same kind of malevolence as the Witch Queen.

(In the first place, it was the old woman who forced me to come here in this outfit, so I guess I'll just have to ask her to bear with it... But more than that, this is a rare opportunity, so it's no good just meeting and introducing myself. Since I'm acting as an intermediary for Masui, the King of Magiyoku, this meeting needs to have some value...)

Having escaped the initial crisis, Takuma's thoughts finally began to clear with relief.

“Let me order the tea.”

Kiriko signaled to the lady-in-waiting to give Takuma some time to think.

(Well, what should I do? To be honest, I'm not Mahakuten, and given our family's nature, I don't think they'll just hand over the leadership so easily.)

Magiyoku was an absolute dog-eat-dog world. To begin with, Gyokuren—Masui herself—was not the eldest child, yet she held the position of Queen. Takuma was only known by rumor, and he didn't know the details, but it was said that the kings of Mahaku had always ascended to the throne after surviving brutal struggles.

(There's a possibility that I'll be kicked out of Racepshi with nothing but the clothes on my back. Oh well, I guess I won't be able to take it easy after all...)

He turned his attention to the old woman standing behind him.

(She looks awfully happy.)

It was likely that she was reacting to Kiriko's ferocious aura. It felt as though the emotions she usually kept bottled up deep in her heart were starting to leak out.

(...Oh no. In the end, this old woman is just like the person at the top of Mahaku, Masui-sama.)

In short, the old lady's outlandish behavior was intentional, and she was just enjoying Takuma's reaction.

(Maybe it was a setup when she made me attend this meeting. So what was her intention in bringing me here? ...Anyway, regardless of what the old lady's intentions were, let's start afresh.)

When Takuma finished his tea, he prepared himself.

“Masaki Kiriko-sama, it's an honor to meet you. My name is Mahaku Takuma, and I am the candidate for Commander-in-Chief of Mahakuten.”

Takuma stood and bowed deeply.

“I am delighted to have this opportunity. Although extraterritoriality applies here, this conference is unofficial, so according to Racepshi custom, it is acceptable.”

Kiriko paused, then returned to her normal tone.

“Thank you.”

Takuma gave a small bow and sat down.

“Honestly, this is all so sudden and confusing. However, as the Princess said, I feel that this is a rare opportunity.”

“I understand your feelings. Those who have been involved with my husband, Yamada Seina, have experienced the same thing many times. In fact, that's how we met.”

“I think we need to exchange information so that we can have a correct understanding of each other.”

In other words, it was confirmation of the balance of power between the two parties.

Yamada Seina, whom Kiriko wanted to protect, was the owner of a Godly Knight, which was considered precious in Renza. Many people flocked to the Godly Knights and plotted to use them for their own purposes. However, if Takuma was right, the Godly Knights were both precious and cursed objects that brought terrible disasters.

“Yes.”

Kiriko nodded in agreement. Without a doubt, the company that had the biggest conflict of interest with Kiriko and her group in Renza was the Armored Cavalry manufacturer that Takuma belonged to. They were trying to find the distance between the two.

“Honestly, the people of Renza, myself included, are ignorant about the Galactic Federation. I imagine the Galactic Federation side is the same, given how isolated we are from each other, but at least the Princess here has some understanding.”

“If the data about the Galactic Federation's outline and census is publicly available over there, it can be viewed within Racepshi.”

Kiriko instantly displayed a rough comparison of Renza’s data in front of Takuma.

“?……I see.”

At the moment, Renza's controlled space was roughly half the size of the Galactic Federation, and its economy was less than a third of that of the Federation. What was even more serious was the speed of economic development of the Galactic Federation.

(If these figures are to be believed, ...)

It became clear how pirate suppression was promoting economic development in that region, and why Hakuren and the others kidnapped Seina. In fact, Renza had conducted simulations of what would happen if there were no pirate attacks, and Takuma had discussed this with his friends at school. The figures they calculated at that time were certainly very close to the data shown here, although the scale was different.

(In other words, the longer it takes, the greater the power gap will become, and in some cases...)

If the Galactic Federation had any spare capacity, it would be possible for them to defeat our pirates from the other side.

(If that happens, they will have complete control...)

Takuma desperately tried to suppress his emotional turmoil.

“Princess, you obtained a Brain Tree unit in a duel... I believe it is called the Royal Tree in your area. What do you plan to do with it?”

It was the opening of a conversation, but it got to the heart of the matter.

“All units have already been deactivated for protection.”

“!?...I thought so.”

Takuma was taken aback by her straightforward answer. He had expected it, but the shock of being confronted with reality was suprisingly large.

“If that's the case, then manufacturer maintenance would be unnecessary, and I understand why you would refuse to return it, but wouldn't that be an obstacle to your objective?”

Such an act would completely antagonize the forces controlling Renza.

“Excuse me.”

At that moment, there was a light knock as Souren came in and whispered something to Kiriko.

“Yes, I understand. I'm sorry, but I have an urgent matter to attend to so I will have to leave for a bit.”

Kiriko said this and after making sure Takuma nodded, she left the room. It might be different if this was a formal meeting, but for an unscheduled meeting, it was common for them to have to leave the room like this. Since the other person was in a higher position, he had no complaints. Also, it seemed like Souren would stay behind to talk to him, so it would be a good chance for the tense Takuma to take a breather.

X X X

“It's been a long time, Mrs. Mahakuten....Mahaku Takuma(?)-sama.”

Souren moved a stool that was placed against the wall and sat next to Takuma, then bowed. He seemed confused as to how to respond to Takuma in drag.

“Ah! Ah, my sisters were just having fun, and I was brought here after a series of events...”

“Is that so...?”

Souren glanced at the old woman for an answer, but she just smiled silently and seemed relieved by his response.

(So not saying anything was on purpose after all...?)

As Takuma thought this and gave the old woman a cold look, she suddenly stood up.

“Now that the greetings are over, I will be taking my leave.”

“Nanny? But we're still in the middle of our conversation.”

“Takuma-sama, it would be best if you continued your conversation with the princess.”

“Oh, I see...”

Now that he had confirmed that Kiriko had picked a fight with Santen, the manufacturer of Armored Cavalry, he, as the acting representative of Mahakuten, had no reason to engage in any further discussions. The negotiations had already broken down.

“So, can I stay here?”

“Takuma-sama has already been expelled from Mahakuten. Your personal assets and belongings have already been collected and placed in storage on Racepshi, so please rest assured.”

“Really... now?”

Takuma hadn't expected he would be able to take over Mahakuten. He expected that he would be put through some kind of test. But he never expected to be exiled in such a situation.

“I think this is the best possible situation, don't you?”

“But! But if that was your intention from the beginning, you should have let me get changed before coming here! You must find it amusing, right?”

“Hohoho, this is a place where hobbyists gather so it's fine. Take care.”

The smiling old woman left Takuma stunned.

“...Could this be the way the children of Magiyoku are given their independence?” Souren quietly said out to Takuma, who looked on in shock.

“Yes... well, yes, that's probably what happened. I guess they thought it was time to throw me out because of the criticism I made at the Representative Council. Well, it's better than being thrown out in the middle of nowhere.....”

If he was unlucky, he could have ended up being thrown onto some uncharted planet and become like “the lion who throws his cubs into the valley.”

“I see.”

“But you know...”

The only problem was that he was thrown into this situation dressed as a woman, which was rather awkward for a man. However, it was fortunate (perhaps?) that he was so beautiful

that no one would think he was a man. People who didn't know him wouldn't have any problems. Of course, that excluded the psychological damage to the person himself...

“Well, my personal belongings are already in Racepshi. Ah.”

Takuma operated the terminal to check something and then slumped his shoulders in disappointment.

“Is there a problem?”

“I just inquired about it... My personal assets and belongings are being inspected, and I can't access them for two days...”

“What? ... The luggage is one thing, but your personal assets seem strange. Should I inquire about this?”

“Ah, no. It's probably the old woman’s doing. I'll have to stay like this for a while... Well, at least I have an idea.”

“We have uniforms here, if you'd like...”

As Souren spoke, Kiriko came in. Soren quickly stood up and returned the stool to its original position.

“Sorry to keep you waiting. Now let's continue our conversation.”

“Um, well... actually...”

Soren looked at the person next to Takuma.

“Yes, I have received the report so don't worry. Now we can talk without hesitation.”

After Kiriko spoke, the lady-in-waiting began to brew a new cup of tea. To put him in a better mood, this time she served some sweet snacks, perhaps to put him at ease.

“However, as I have been kicked out of Mahakuten at this time, it will be difficult for me to meet your expectations.”

“I didn't have any hopes for the old-fashioned Santen to begin with. What's needed is something much further down the line.”

“Further down the line?”

Long story short, he quickly revealed the information Santen wanted and kicked the old woman out.

“Considering what happened in the Galactic Federation and what’s happened here, the barriers between us and the Renza Federation may disappear in the near future. If that is the case, we would like to have someone who can understand our side of the story as much as possible.”

“That kind of future is possible, but to be honest, I'm not sure it's in the near future.”

“I understand how you feel. That's what everyone over there felt. But the fact that I'm here now and that the Maintainers have appeared is a reality.”

“That’s……”

“No matter how absurd it may seem, we have seen it up close and personal, and most of the pirate guilds in the Galactic Federation have been wiped out.”

“Indeed, I've heard that ..... Masui-sama and others came here..... with you in anticipation of that.”

“Heh. Though their methods were a bit aggressive.”

“Then why not narrow the search for Yamada Seina-sama?”

Making Santen their enemy was, in a way, the same as making Renza their enemy.

“Still, there are some things I can’t give up.”

It was a resolute attitude. His expression exuded an iron will.

“An inalienable reason for breaking away from Santen, huh...?”

Takuma glanced over at the spot where the old woman had been standing a moment ago.

(So he revealed that information so easily in order to send the old woman home...)

Although Takuma understood the meaning of the conversation from earlier, he felt a little uneasy about what he was about to hear. However, when he looked back at Kiriko, his resolve was strengthened by the calm expression on her face as she looked at him.

“I appreciate your concern for my husband. However... I hate to say it, but this kind of trouble is normal for him.”

Kiriko chuckled and breathed a big sigh.

“Always?”

“I can tell you from experience that even if it seems like a roundabout way, this is the shortest route.”

(This is... worse than I thought.)

Kiriko's expression and words caused a huge spike on the graph on the screen, and even Takuma was forced to acknowledge that the flow of history was accelerating rapidly.

“If that's the case, then there's no way I'm just going to run away after coming all the way here. First, may I ask you the reason for your breakup with Santen?”

“Yeah, ...This has a lot to do with your Brain Tree.....”

Kiriko smiled, nodded slightly and began to speak.

“To us on Jurai, the Imperial Trees are important friends. You could even say they are family.”

“Does that mean we can assume that the higher generation Brain Trees have a clear will?”

This is what Takuma wanted to know the most. There were many secrets about the Five Sacred Machines. In fact, the Brain Tree itself was top secret.

“My ancestors were immigrants to Jurai, so the Imperial Tree was the original inhabitant of Jurai, so to speak.”

“The original inhabitants? ... If they are intelligent life forms, then yes, that would be the case...”

“Hehe. And it wasn't just any intelligent life form.”

Kiriko looked to the side and turned on the monitor.

“This is Tsunami-sama, the ancestor of all Royal Trees.”

“This is... huge.”

Images of Jurai were displayed one after another on the monitor, and Takuma was overwhelmed by their grandeur.

“The ten-kilometer-tall tree known as Tenju is, in a sense, the shell of Tsunami-sama. It is the largest tree that has been confirmed in the Galaxy Federation, and our capital city is currently built on it.”

“Is it an empty shell? Sorry, but I don't understand.”

“Tsunami-sama is what you would call a high-dimensional life form. While she was sleeping on Planet Jurai, her body turned into a tree, which then grew to a gigantic size, becoming Tenju. The story goes that it was a sort of biological defense to regulate the planet's environment, but it apparently grew to this size in the hundreds of millions of years it took for it to meet our ancestors and awaken. After that, her consciousness was separated from her, and we inherited and used the remaining tree-like body.”

“Well, then it's just like the Creation of the World!”

“That's true.”

In reality, she was a being called one of the Top Gods, but Kiriko couldn't reveal that here. But the story so far had given him a good idea of her power.

“We have observed some phenomena here that may have been caused by higher dimensional lifeforms... but their very existence is still present in Jurai... is that still the case?”

“I don't know where she is or what she is doing, but... it seems that three-dimensional time and space, and even the laws of physics, have no meaning to her.”(TN: Well, you know, other than cooking and cleaning in Tenchi’s house.)

“It's almost like she's a god. Does that mean she's also the ancestor of the Brain Tree?”

“That's right. Haven't you seen the battle between the Godly Knights? That wasn't a battle where the Godly Knights were fighting at their full power. If the first generation unleashes all the power they can, the space within the galaxy region will be easily wiped out.”

“That's... that bad...”

“If you use the Brain Tree, surely you can make some predictions? With each generation, its power weakens... so what about the other way around?”

“That's.....”

“Even the first generation had that much power. So when it comes to the founder... I don't think a small-minded person can do anything about it based on their own selfish ideas.”

“But, but, aren't you also using the Royal Trees as a weapon?”

“We're not using it. I said family, right? The Royal Trees are just protecting us and themselves.”

“So it's not something you control?”

“Hehe... It seems that our ancestors, the first people who entered Jurai, became friends with Tsunami-sama when they met her.”

“So, friends...huh?”

“It's not surprising that you're surprised. However, in present day Jurai, due to an agreement with Tsunami-sama, the royal trees of Jurai must choose a partner from among the royal family of Jurai. This is, of course, to protect the family, but my husband's case is irregular. He met ZINV-sama, who was asleep on a certain planet, by chance and became its partner. You may already know this story, as I have been interviewed by Racepshi.”

“So that means you're family... It's a strange feeling. It feels quite different from common sense here.”

“The lesser trees you use cannot express their will clearly. However, that doesn't mean they have no will at all.”

“I have certainly heard such reports, but the manufacturers have dismissed them as the occult or urban legends.”

“Well, I can understand that it's more convenient that way. Jurai does something similar, although they do it after carefully assessing their opponent.”

“Excuse me, but why are the higher-ranked trees managed by Jurai? If they have a will of their own, shouldn't they be allowed to do as they please?”

“Although they have high combat abilities, those kids are far more intelligent than humans. I think this is hard to imagine unless you've actually experienced it, but... those kids are adorable.”

Kiriko's expression was as if she was looking at a puppy or kitten, unable to contain her tickling ability.

“They're adorable?”

“It makes me feel guilty about making them fight. That's why I'm protecting them... The reality is that even here, there are many who only want power from those children.”

“It sounds like you want to monopolize their power, doesn’t it?”

He knew it was rude to ask, but he still needed to ask even if it upset her.

“I don’t intend to deny that, and it’s reasonable to think that way. However, it is those children’s will that they want the current situation to continue.”

“Does that mean the Royal Tree has made a clear and public statement of its intentions?”

“It would be easier if they were assertive children. I described them as cute, right? We've had many people come into contact with those children in the past, but when they wanted to use their powers, they ended up using force to get them. That's why we're the ones taking the brunt of it.”

“That's going to be hard for them to understand.”

“Hehe, in that sense, our dueling system is convenient and fine.”

Takuma felt a chill of awe down his spine as Kiriko smiled.

“This may sound like sophistry to you, but if we limit the number of partners to only the royal family and avoid outflow, it will be like sowing the seeds of chaos. Even if it is a Tree of the lowest rank, such as one of your Five Holy Machines, surely you can understand a little better?”

“I understand what you mean. Santen currently has a monopoly on that technology.”

“In return, the Imperial Family's ships accept various restrictions and surveillance over their actions. When a partner Imperial Family member dies, the Imperial Family Tree will become a gravestone of its own volition, take root in the earth, and lose its power.”

“So it's only for use by one generation... If they are willing to go to such lengths to protect it, I can understand why they call it family.”

Takuma sighed and frowned. Now the real questions began.

“So, just to confirm, is it true that you removed the protection from the Brain Tree unit?”

“Of course. So I know what Santen did to those kids.”

Kiriko looked at Takuma with a blank look on her face. Her expressionless face, like a Noh mask, was so terrifying that Takuma's whole body froze, and he couldn't move or even breathe. However, Kiriko quickly closed her eyes, and Takuma was finally able to take a deep breath.

“But the same can be said about the Galactic Federation. There are many who fear those children's power and see them as nothing more than weapons.”

“So, as Jurai, what do you intend to do with Santen?”

“Nothing.”

“They are your family, aren't they?”

“I was angry at first, but I soon came to understand how those kids felt.”

“Understand?”

“After all, many of the children we've acquired... have developed feelings for their knights.”

“Affection for the knights, you say... It is true that many of the knights feel something special about the Armored Cavalry's Brain Tree. Some even believe that if they can communicate with it, they can unleash power beyond their normal capabilities... However, the knights remain in control, and the Brain Tree is simply a system of the Armored Cavalry.”

“If they feel affection for a knight, those children will try to act in accordance with their wishes. That's probably what makes the slightest difference. But that's only true for the lower-ranked children you're dealing with, right? What you must keep in mind is that the higher-ranked children have strong bonds with their partners and will not hesitate to use their powers against anyone who harms them or their partners.”

“That's a chilling thought... But if they have intelligence and family bonds, that's how it would be, I suppose. Still...”

Takuma realized how dangerous it was that Renza took their common sense for granted, but he had no proof that what Kiriko was saying was true.

“An easy example would be... during the duel, the actions of Kamidake, the other ship belonging to my husband, who cut through the mysterious organization's armored cavalry. That child has a mind of her own and is truly devoted to her husband, so she forgot herself and rushed out to save him in his time of crisis.”

“That's it? I'm sure they said it was a combined part...”

Even if it was really a part, it cut through an Armored Cavalry that was on par with the Five Holy Machines. That alone made it unusual, and it would be better if they said it was a royal ship instead.

“Let me assure you, this does not violate our dueling laws. That's the logic that's being used by the pirates.”

“Indeed... so that ship is also from the Imperial Tree?”

“Kamidake is not a royal tree. And the same goes for my sacred machine, the Godly Knight Yomotsu Ookami.”

“What?! It's not a royal tree?”

The mysterious organization's Armored Cavalry was on par with the Five Holy Machines, and the Armored Cavalry of the princes who dueled Kiriko were the highest-ranking manufacturers. If the thing that overwhelmed them had no connection to the Royal Trees, it would be a major incident.

“The Galactic Federation has a research school organization on the scale of a planetary system called the Galaxy Academy. It was made by one of the most outstanding scientists and philosophers there. As you would expect, the technology to make Godly Knights-class machines is not publicly available, and it's not something that can be mass-produced.”

“Is that so……”

Takuma began to think about sorting out the information.

(So, even without the Brain Tree, they have the technological capability to develop a Godly Knight? I don't know if that's true or a bluff, but the Princess' Yomotsu-Ookami definitely had the power to be called a Godly Knight, and when the ship called Kamidake cut through a Five Sacred Machine class, the energy output was incredible... Either way, it's dangerous to underestimate their scientific capabilities.)

For better or worse, the technology for the Armored Cavalry was monopolized by Santen, and there was almost no competition between companies. And because the Armored Cavalry were the symbol of Renza, the center of scientific development was mainly related to the Armored Cavalry.

(That's right... it's distorted. That's why it's possible that development is lagging behind.)

Kiriko smiled and patiently waited for Takuma to think.

“In the first place……”

Takuma looked up.

“What exactly is a philosopher? Normally, there aren't many scientists who have the skills to work in multiple fields. Can I assume that they are the ones who oversee a large number of staff?”

“Philosophers combine technology from multiple fields, create new ways to use it, and are in charge of the ethics of its use. That's why philosophers are allowed to see all the data being researched at the Galaxy Academy. Since the Galaxy Academy is the highest-ranking academic institution in the Federation, the data stored there includes all of the data of the Galaxy Federation, including companies and individuals.”

“Such authority? Not in a published paper? ... How could you do such a thing...?”

“Of course, even philosophers are not all-powerful. Each has their own area of expertise, and some even have thousands of staff members under their control... but the philosopher who created the Kamidake and the Yomotsu Ookami is a monster who has lived for 20,000 years and conducts research and development on her own.”

“What the... is that for real? Who is that person?”

Renza also has life extension technology, but even so, it was only for a thousand years.

“If you're interested, a detailed overview and history of the Galaxy Academy is available for public viewing, so I recommend you take a look.”

Kiriko gave Takuma access to various data related to the Galaxy Academy. This was in-depth data that was only available to a very small percentage of the academy, including company leaders and experts.

(.....I see. So, you want to create a company within Renza that can compete with Santen and revitalize it.)

Takuma glanced over the surface data and understood Kiriko's intentions. It was also related to the timing of him being kicked out of Mahakuten.

(Old hag... If things go well, she's planning to outdo the other two... That sounds interesting, but I wonder if it will go according to her plan. Well, whether or not she seizes this opportunity...)

The rest was up to Takuma's will.

“That sounds pretty interesting, doesn't it?”

Takuma decided to take Kiriko's hand.

“Well... let's leave it at that for today. I'm sure you also have a lot of things to get in order.”

“Huh? Ah, yes.”

At that moment, Takuma remembered that he was cross-dressing.

“There's no need to rush. Let's calm down first.”

Kiriko nodded in satisfaction.

Chapter Four: The Cat Fairy Saw It

“I'm interested in Seina!”

Someone had been secretly watching Takuma and Kiriko's conversation from outside the window. The person happily left the scene and headed for the transfer gate to the pirate suppression unit headquarters.

“I'm interested in Seina!”

“I'm interested in Seina!”

“I'm interested in Seina!”

The one repeating this was none other than one of the cat fairies. They had no ill intentions. However, they had a habit of repeating memorable words over and over and passing them on to their comrades. If that cat fairy went through the teleportation gate to the base or bridge where the other comrades were, the information would spread in an instant. If that happened, it would take a lot of effort to contain it, and this conversation in particular could cause reputational damage to each department, dealing a blow that Takuma would never be able to recover from.

“Meowwooooooon!”

Fuku jumped out from the bushes and pounced on the cat fairy like a carnivorous animal on the hunt.

“Wait! Demon beast nyaaaaa!”

Cat fairy hunting was Fuku's hobby. However, since Kiriko and the girls were always watching her, she refrained from attacking cat fairies that weren't causing problems... Well, she did playfully tease them sometimes, but that's as far as she went. But when a cat fairy spied on an important meeting and tried to spread rumors about her master like it was a biohazard, she couldn't hold back any longer.

“Miyamiyamiyamiyamiyamiyaaa~~~~~nn♡”

With a big smile on her face, Fuku mercilessly executed justice. Even if it was just to vent her anger at Seina's disappearance, it was still about maintaining peace at the pirate suppression unit's base. It was the execution of justice after all.

“Miyamiyamiyamiyamiyamiyaaa~~~~~nn♡”

“Migyaaaaaaaaaan.”

She grappled with the cat fairy, gently bit its throat, grabbed it by its clothes with a cat punch and swung it around. Fuku looked extremely happy as she carried out her duties.

“The magical beast is ..... afraid of nyaa ..... afraid of ..... nyaa.”

Having been thoroughly toyed with by Fuku, the cat fairy completely lost its train of thought, and as a result, Takuma's honor and the peace and tranquility of the anti-piracy unit were protected.

Although the momentary peace was maintained, the cat fairies never learned their lesson. If they became very interested in something, the knowledge of how to avoid danger that had been memorized in their memory was easily reset.

“Meow!”

So Fuku's battle would continue. Well, it was a good toy for her, so she welcomed it with open arms.

Chapter Five: Founding

After his meeting with Kiriko, Takuma immediately contacted and met with Sansui Namuwarōru Suirei, the third crown prince of the Suirei Kingdom. However...

“Yes, yes! I understand exactly what you want to say. But please believe me, I don't really mean it either and I'm really troubled!”

Takuma was greeted by Sansui and the others with silent, astonished looks on their faces. And to Komako, who was smiling smugly with a hint of murderous intent, Takuma, with a serious face, carefully and patiently explained the events that had occurred up to that point.

“Also, Komako, this was all just my sister’s prank and the old nanny’s malice. You understand, right?”

“I see, I understand the details. If that's the reason, there seems to be no need to report this to the Ethics Committee.”

Racepshi naturally had its own vigilante organization. Commoners were dealt with by them, but when it came to those in positions of power, it became more complicated. To begin with, Racepshi was home to members of the Galactic Federation and even pirates. If any scandals were to come to light, it would tarnish the reputation of Renza, and such incidents had indeed led to leaks of state secrets in the past. The Ethics Committee served as a self-regulatory oversight body for Renza nobility, tasked with preventing such occurrences. Interestingly, the organization was run by noblewomen, including the Five Renzan Queens. They were a formidable group.

“Yeah, I see... I'm glad you understand.”

Takuma truly felt relieved by Komako's words and drank the tea he was given in one gulp. At any rate, he no longer had to worry about being summoned to appear before the Ethics Committee.

(Seriously... I can't believe how much stress I've had today...)

First it was Magiyoku, then Kiriko, and now Komako.

“Takuma, I'd like to hear the details of the meeting right away, but I'll lend you some clothes so could you please get changed first? That would be better for you too, wouldn't it?”

“That would be a relief. I wish I could go out and buy some clothes to change into, but my personal assets are frozen... and I don't want anyone I know to see me in this outfit.”

“It's a little late now, but is it okay for us?”

“You guys won't spread the word around, will you? Besides, a scandal involving a party member can be fatal.”

“Party member? Takuma, what's that!?”

Sansui and the others instantly beamed with joy at Takuma's words.

“Ah, I can't relax anymore.”

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“I see... So that's why you rushed over here without even changing your clothes. Now I understand why you want to make Santen your enemy.”

“Right? ...Huh?”

Hearing Sansui's intriguing words, Takuma's eyes widened.

“I thought that if Souren-dono was there, you could at least borrow some clothes.”

“Ahhh!!”

Takuma, who had completely forgotten that he could borrow a uniform from Souren, collapsed weakly onto the table.

“...All the hard work I put in to get here while dodging persistent flirting was for nothing... I thought I was staying calm, but it seems I wasn't.”

“Well, with that appearance, I can understand why they would want to hit on you... Ahem... I can understand why you were so excited that you couldn't stay calm.”

“Hmm... But that princess sure is fearless. Or maybe she just doesn't know how scary Santen is?”

“With Kaou around, that's not likely. Besides, as the princess of a country, she should know the meaning of power, right?”

“That's true. Even so, it's an undeniable fact that the Godly Knights, made without the Brain Tree and using only their technology, have demonstrated the ability to fight against the Armored Cavalry, the highest-ranking cavalry made by Santen. I've heard that the Princess is already gaining more and more sympathizers, especially among lower-ranking knights, so they should become a force that can't be ignored.”

“If they use the dueling system well with that power, they won't be easily defeated.”

In battle, the more powerful the opponent, the more advantageous it was. However, the duel system could turn that disadvantage around.

“Let's start by sorting out the information. Now that we've formed a party, all we have to do is run errands for our elder brothers. We're no longer bound by the shackles that say it's up to the higher-ups to think ahead and that it would be considered excessive for us to interfere. Of course, we can continue to follow suit as we have done up until now.”

Takuma's spirits were lifted by Sansui and the others' light-hearted banter, and he took a deep breath.

“I'm sorry to involve you guys, but I can't deny that it's my fault... But I think the time has come.”

“We also feel that we are at a crossroads. Then we need to discuss what to do next... Right?”

Sansui looked around and saw that everyone agreed.

“Thank you. Now... as you can see from looking at some of the documents, the economic scale of Renza and that country is completely different.”

Takuma displayed some data from the website that Kiriko told him about.

“Hmm... There’s been a lot of development, especially since the pirate obstacles were removed.”

“Well, that's to be expected... According to this document, the scale of the pirates over there and the amount of damage they caused were ridiculous.”

“If you add them all up, doesn't that exceed the total production of Renza?”

“That's right... If we could completely eliminate that problem, how much of the manpower and funds we spent on dealing with it could we redirect to development...”

“This Galaxy Academy has a long history and is of an incredible scale. With a joint police force covering the entire federation, there's no doubt that the stabilization of public order will put them at an even greater advantage over other powers.”

The more they looked at it, the more the difference in scale between the two became apparent. Of course, they couldn't just accept it at face value.

“Just to confirm, how reliable is this information from the Galactic Academy?”

Sansui turned to look at Komako, who would likely have that kind of information. In fact, her information network was wider than anyone else here.

“It almost entirely matches the information we have gathered so far, and more than anything, it's proof that it was Masui Gyokuren who introduced Takuma to the princess over there.”

“I have certainly seen it with my own eyes, so is it reasonable to assume that this information is true?”

“At worst, we could be swallowed up by the Galactic Federation... That's pretty scary.”

“Isn't it too early to think about that?”

“You should feel a sense of crisis. In the first place, the reason Hakuren-sama and the others brought Yamada Seina was to eliminate the pirates and achieve the same stability as over there, right? However, while they thought they had successfully eliminated only the pirates, they ended up dragging out the dark side of Renza. To be honest, I think the situation is becoming more and more troublesome even before the Galactic Federation comes along.”

“It's true that there are six Godly Knights and Five Holy Machines. And the Maintainers, who have been rumored for a long time, have infiltrated the center of power more than we thought. It feels like the conspiracy theory has become a bit of a reality.”

Washu's prank had exposed the hidden pests more than expected. This kind of prank was commonplace at Galaxy Academy, but it was unbearable when it was done in a normal place. What may be playful for Washu was deadly poison in the normal world.

“It's certain that the pirate Armored Cavalry is also involved... isn't this a very dangerous situation?”

“If things go wrong, isn't it possible that the pirates and the Maintainers could take control before the Galactic Federation does?”

“It might have been dangerous if they had continued to operate in the shadows without coming out into the open. However, their Godly Knight is in a draw with Yamada Seina. He has defeated one of the Five Holy Knights... and then there's the Princess' Godly Knight. They make a good counterweight. But what's more important is why the Maintainers suddenly showed up.”

“If we think about it logically, it must be because they viewed the Godly Knight as a threat?”

“It certainly feels strange. That's the Maintainers’ greatest strength. But if she has something even more hidden than that, then I'm totally helpless.”

“I also think that's the Maintainers' greatest strength. The fact that they came to destroy the Godly Knights with that strength means that they must have decided that it was the Maintainers' greatest obstacle.”

Takuma looked at Sansui and the others meaningfully.

“...Ah, I understand what Takuma is trying to say. So, it's Yamada Seina and the others' actions themselves that are being viewed as dangerous, right?”

“Hmm? What do you mean?”

“So Yamada Seina was brought here to help get rid of pirates, right? But the results were not good.”

“Apparently there were many people among them who weren't pirates. That's why the extermination force was disbanded... Huh?”

“Maybe... it was actually going well?”

Most of the people Seina encountered were members of the privileged class. There were almost no pirates. That's why his abilities were questioned, the unit was downsized, and Karen and the others were sent back to their parents.

“If you think about it that way, it all makes sense. It's just a possibility though.”

“What if those who were deemed not to be pirates were in fact Maintainers...”

“That's enough reason to consider Yamada Seina dangerous. So why don't we investigate those people...?”

“Among the suspects are nobles and people in important positions. It's currently impossible for us to investigate them.”

On the other hand, from Sansui's perspective, there was a high possibility that they would be crushed.

“I agree with Takuma. Perhaps the higher-ups are aware of this?”

“Since I noticed it, I’m sure they’re investigating in secret. However, the Maintainers forces are not normal, and they’ve penetrated the core, so I don’t think they can do anything large-scale.”

“Well, we should probably keep this conversation between us. After all, it seems that even my brothers have been having trouble identifying Maintainers ever since that incident.”

Even if there were suspicious people, it was unclear to what extent they were involved. In reality, it was highly likely they were only being used without their knowledge, and if they

were all eliminated, the government would be paralyzed. Furthermore, the interests of the nobles were intricately intertwined, and there was a possibility that simply conducting an interview investigation could make the problem worse. In any case, it seemed that they didn't know where the landmines were hiding.

“It seems that the stability of Renza under the rule of the Five Royal Families is a disaster. In the worst-case scenario, we may have to consider the possibility of Renza splitting up...”

Although they were originally called the Five Royal Families, over their long history, the power structures, interests, and blood ties had become intricately intertwined, forming a relationship similar to that of a single nation, and they were now in a state where they were infiltrated by Maintainers in a complex way. It was like cancer cells metastasizing throughout the body. It was nearly impossible to separate them all, and even if it were possible, they would not be able to maintain their vital functions.

“If our deduction is correct, then Yamada Seina is the key after all? Just as he was effective in fighting pirates over there, he could be used to identify Maintainers here.”

“There is a problem. The reason why the princess is willing to make Santen her enemy is not just because of the Brain Tree. It is also to ensure the safety of Yamada Seina, the master of the Godly Knight.”

“Ah, so that's what Takuma's thinking is leading to...”

“Well, yes. The reason we wanted to capture Yamada Seina in the first place was to find the legendary Godly Knight, but on top of that there was already a lot of fighting between various forces, and now we have to deal with the princess over there and the Maintainers as well.”

“We certainly can't act carelessly. Even the slightest mistake could cause the fire to spread everywhere.”

“Based on Yamada Seina's records over there, it seems like this won't be just a flare-up. If that's the case, I'm curious about the Galactic Federation's actions. It all started when Hakuren-sama and her people used force to bring Yamada Seina over. They might intervene here under the pretext of protecting Yamada Seina. It's not a problem right now, but if things fall into chaos here...”

The problem was that Seina and the others were top-tier VIPs over there. They couldn't deny the possibility that they might force their way here under the pretext of protecting VIPs.

“In the end, forming a cooperative relationship with the Princess is the most realistic plan.”

“The problem is our rank.”

“That means we can't even act as messengers. The moment we join forces with the Princess; we'll be subject to punishment... If we're not careful, it could end up working to the Maintainers’ advantage.”

“So, what should we do about it? It feels like we're forcing this into the spotlight. However, as the princess over there also said, whenever Yamada Seina is involved, things always move forward suddenly.”

“Maybe it's the Godly Knight of the Maintainers. Well, if you think that they have shown some promise, it's an honor and a chance... but our powers are still weak. Isn't it too early for us to fight on the public stage?”

“That’s purely for our convenience. The times are changing at an incredible speed, so if we try to protect ourselves now, the outcome may end up being decided while we remain just errand running boys for our brothers.”

“Even so, I think you can still live a relatively peaceful life.”

Jikki smiled sarcastically.

“Hehe. Is that what you want, Jikki?”

“Not at all. If I try everything and it doesn't work, that's fine too. I'm a realist.”

“So, shall we continue the discussion like this?”

Everyone answered Takuma's question with a smile in the affirmative. Sansui and the others had felt a sense of stagnation in their own positions up until now, so they had no objections to Takuma's proposal. However, they were just confirming each other's thoughts on the matter and working to reach a consensus.

“...Okay, everyone, no objections then.”

“I know this is going to dampen your enthusiasm, but the real question is what can we do? Listening to Takuma and the princess's conversation, I don't think she has very high expectations of us.”

“I understand that. For now, Kaou is our biggest supporter. Our next challenge will be how to increase our presence.”

“But what will Kaou do next? It wouldn't be surprising if he decided to take advantage of this opportunity to become the chief of Renza while continuing to lead the princess's support.”

“For now, Souren-sama's former royal family is on the Princess' side, but the democratic faction is keeping a watchful eye. They are also under the influence of the Maintainers’.” Komako added some additional information while brewing a new cup of tea.

“Since Hakuren-sama and the others are unable to provide direct backup, this is a good chance to make inroads.”

“It's also more dangerous, but it's worth it.”

“By the way... what would happen if a force other than the princess got hold of Yamada Seina first? In fact, that's a very good possibility.”

“It depends on the state of the Godly Knight. I have no idea about that, but... I think the only way to get him to join in is to appease its master, Yamada Seina.”

“If it's as the princess said, then it's true, right?”

“Well, yes. But if what you've said is true, then that power will be directed at you.”

Since the Godly Knight was trying to protect its Master, if they took drastic measures towards Seina, then the same destructive force that occurred during the duel would occur there.

“That's .....That's a truly chilling story.”

“Even before I asked the Princess, it was suggested that the higher Brain Trees may have their own will. It's definitely best not to provoke them.”

“... so that means the situation changes depending on who you come into contact with first, right?”

It was like Russian roulette with bullets that had the power of a nuclear explosion.

“We certainly can't take too long.”

“Assuming we successfully protect Yamada Seina, our ideal situation would be to carry out my sister's plan, eliminate the influence of pirates, or rather the Maintainers, and develop Renza under the current system, right?”

“If that happens, we'll be able to present ourselves as an equal when facing the Galaxy Federation. And from the way you speak, it seems like that's what they want too.”

“Well, it would be the cheapest and safest thing for them.”

War was costly, and if a country was destroyed, it took time and money to rebuild. If the country suffered a lot of resentment, maintaining law and order required a huge amount of manpower and budget. Dominating another country was not an easy task.

“Now, the question is how we can increase our presence in the flow or become part of the core of the flow... I guess it comes back to the Armored Cavalry, doesn't it?

“That's right. At the moment, the Armored Cavalry are the main fighting force in Renza. For the Princess to be able to function to her full potential, she will need a corps of Armored Cavalry to act as her hands and feet.”

“There's no doubt about that, since she called out to Takuma. She's got quite a few Brain Trees that she obtained in the duel, after all.”

“Does Takuma still have some kind of foothold in Mahakuten?”

“Unfortunately... it's completely cut off from the center and its surrounding areas. That's been thoroughly covered.”

“But since they completely refused to return the Brain Tree, it's probably impossible to get Santen’s cooperation anyway. It's probably going to be difficult for Kaou to do anything related to the Armored Cavalry without the cooperation of Santen. It would have been better if each country still had their own manufacturers.”

By merging into three, they had become independent of each country.

“Even though we have a monopoly on the technology of the Armored Cavalry, Santen cannot manufacture Armored Cavalry on their own. They can only do so if they have subcontractors with superior skills.”

“Oh, so the princess gave you the information about the Galaxy Academy.”

This meant that the Galaxy Academy could provide the technology to manufacture Armored Cavalry and large humanoid weapons.

“I know I may say this, but there are many subcontractors who are treated poorly under a monopoly. So, depending on the conditions, there is a possibility that we can attract them.”

“But Armored Cavalry technology is quite specialized. Is it even possible to transfer that technology?”

“If we are to believe the Princess' story, then... both the Godly Knight Yomotsu Ookami and the ship called Kamidake that cut through the Maintainer's Armored Cavalry were made by a scientist over there called a Philosopher. What's surprising is that they didn't use the Brain Tree.”

“Well... I had heard rumors like that, but... Is that why he has that much power?”

“If that is true, then there is no problem with the technology of the Godly Knight... but is it possible that Santen secretly cooperated in the creation of the Godly Knight Yomotsu-Ookami?”

“For better or worse, Santen is in a state of mutual surveillance. I think it would be impossible to keep the creation of such a large Armored Cavalry completely secret. The Yomotsu Ookami itself is quite unusual.”

“It feels more like a living thing than a machine... And to achieve that kind of power without the Brain Tree...”

“I think detailed verification is necessary, but from what I saw of the documents from over there, it's clear that the scientific level is different from ours. It's frustrating, though.”

“Now that I think about it, I heard that when Racepshi moved over there, a bunch of people came and bought all their products.”

It was well known that merchants and manufacturers flocked to Racepshi to purchase advanced home appliances sourced from the Galactic Federation.

“There's no doubt that the princess has connections with scientists who have the technology to at least create a Godly Knight class. If we can use their advanced technology to manufacture and maintain the Godly Knights, I think we could surpass Santen.”

“If the Armored Cavalry achieves success, more subcontractors will be drawn to us.”

“So the problem is the budget.”

While Sansui and the others were having a good conversation, Komako dropped a bombshell: “Money is the foundation of everything.”

“Haha, that's true. Without Santen's cooperation, the initial investment for the Armored Cavalry production line will have to come out of our own pockets, and even if we borrow money, it's unlikely that we'll be able to get a loan based on our credit rating alone. The major banks are already fully committed.”

“The truth is, we also want to expand our activities. We're trying to raise funds by using government funding and our personal assets as collateral, but... we're having a hard time. It's difficult to say, but...”

Sansui gave a wry smile and looked at Takuma.

“So you were counting on me. If only you had come to me before I got kicked out...but that's just complaining.”

“However, thanks to you expressing your intention to join, the minimum standard for founding the party has been met, so the response should be a little better.”

“Well, there's no point in thinking about it here. We have an immediate goal, so let's just get moving.”

With that said, Sansui and the others stood up.

Chapter Six: Even dogs walk...

Komako was sitting in an interview room on the top floor of a building housing a cluster of small financial offices, opposite a woman named Sodia, who was an expert in collecting financial information and also served as an advisor.

“Hmm, is that so? A circular was sent here informing us that young Master Mahaku had been exiled, so I had expected this to some extent.”

After hearing the details from Komako, Sodia, who was wearing gold-rimmed glasses and a business suit, said this and leaned back in her chair with her arms crossed.

“If it works, I think it could become a big business.”

“That's true... Even in our industry, we have made predictions about what kind of business might be possible with Jurai’s Princess, in relation to the Yomotsu Ookami and Kamidake.”

“What's the result?”

“At worst, it has been predicted that this could develop into a project that could completely overturn the very foundations of Renza's economy. The technology related to everyday items that Racepshi brings is undoubtedly superior to Renza's. If it were only through Racepshi, that would be one thing, but if it goes through the princess, it could have an impact on the military as well.”

Once it got into military matters, it became a national issue.

“In that case...”

Komako leaned forward expectantly, but Sodia's reaction was cold.

“That's why it's so dangerous to get involved carelessly. And from what I heard from you, if it extends to the Armored Cavalry...”

“It's a terrible thing to ask them to do something about it.”

“I'm sure the banks under Santen have made the same prediction. If Komako tries to raise the amount she wants, Santen will find out and will certainly interfere. What's more, they'll destroy the very foundation of your group.”

That was only natural, as it would not be a game of pretend but a real economic war.

“..... Yes, it will.”

“Personally, I'd like to get on board with that trend at some point, but... maybe it would be better to rely on the financial institutions of the Galaxy Federation.”

“Huh?”

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“...Haa.”

Komako went down to the entrance hall of the financial building, sat down on a sofa in the corner of the hall and sighed.

(The financial institutions on the side of the Galaxy Federation... it would be impossible to just go there and get a large loan.

In the first place, it would be difficult to make contact without a proper introduction...

Basically, the financial connection between the Galactic Federation and Racepshi was through currency exchange. She had heard of cases where a fair amount of money was lent out when borrowing and lending money, but that was only for entertainment purposes. The initial investment cost for an Armored Cavalry manufacturer was an absurd amount that was beyond that range, and of course, this was Racepshi, the entertainment capital. She had heard legendary stories of people who spent ridiculous amounts of money, and the subjects of the rumors were either extraordinarily wealthy or kings of great nations.

(If someone could introduce me to them, it would be Lady Hakuren and her friends, but they are currently in isolation and it would be difficult to contact them, and asking the princess over there would be putting the cart before the horse.)

In the first place, if they were to ask for financial support in order to receive technical support, they would certainly be abandoned. If they wanted to be on an equal footing, they would need to establish a proper system for manufacturing Armored Cavalry.

And at that moment, Komako breathed a big sigh.

“If you keep sighing like that, your luck will slip away.”

“Huh?”

Suddenly, someone called out to her from nearby, and Komako jumped up and shrank back. She wondered how long the woman had been there. She peeked out at her and smiled.

“If you have any worries, come to me.”

“What? .....?”

The woman before her was elegant and had a tremendous presence. For a moment, Koko's image was that of one of the Five Renzan Queens. Such was the impression she gave off... but...

“Um... well.”

Komako's gaze turned from the woman's face a little to the side, to the woman's back as the woman she carried piggy-back kicked her legs. It was so comical that she felt a sense of discomfort with her impression of the woman.

“Oh my, you're a good girl so behave yourself.”

When she stroked her bottom as if she were stroking a child's head, the woman’s legs relaxed as if she had given up.

“.....”

The ridiculous sight made Komako's mind freeze, as she wondered what was going on.

“Come on, let's go.”

The woman didn't seem to mind at all, but instead took Komako's hand and forced her to stand.

“Um, um, where to?”

“It's okay! Just leave it all to me.”

She spoke to Komako in a gentle tone, held her hand, and started walking briskly as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Komako found herself looking at the woman's back as if she was being pulled by a child's hand, and could see the face of the other woman looking over her shoulder.

“Ah...”

The face looked familiar, and she immediately realized it was Maimu.

“.....”

Although their eyes met, neither could resist the mysterious attraction of the woman. And while it seemed as though each was expecting some kind of reaction from the other towards the forceful woman, in the end, both were silently led off.

X X X

(…Maybe I got caught up in some kind of scam?)

After passing through several transfer gates, Komako's mind began to clear, and she began to think. No matter how she looked at it, it was suspicious, but even more than that, the act itself was careless. She thought of various possibilities and continued to work on eliminating them, but even so, she never thought of shaking off the woman's hand.

(No way!?)

However, when Komako emerged from a certain transfer gate, her thoughts were interrupted by the sight she saw there.

The arched tunnel Komako and Maimu were walking through was made entirely of wood. It was an unfamiliar style, but the colorful wood combined gave it a calming atmosphere. However, the arches were incredibly huge, three hundred meters high, and judging from the grain of the wood, it was clear that the wooden foundations were made from a single plank of wood.

"... Jurai?"

What immediately came to mind was Jurai's Tenju that Takuma had shown her. If she thought about it, the trees growing around the giant tree, which was 10 kilometers tall, easily measured in kilometers in terms of proportion. A place where such a magnificent structure was being constructed was not something that an ordinary person could easily enter. Only someone approved by Racepshi could use such a special place.

(So is this person the real deal?)

From her experience of meeting many members of royalty and the nobility up close, Komako knew that this person had an aura of being no ordinary person, but she was confused by her unconventional behavior. And when she was transported to the next place, her thoughts turned into certainty.

"Amazing……"

Once they left the teleportation gate, they came to a high hill, from which they could see an independent residential dock below, the sort used by royalty and nobility.

And there, moored at the dock, was an elegantly decorated super-large ship, measuring tens of kilometers in length, with a garden and buildings on its deck. What was a bit odd was that, unlike most ships of this type, there was only one escort vessel in sight. The dock itself had plenty of space, and there were even quarters that could accommodate thousands of people, so it was unlikely that other ships were moored elsewhere.

"Welcome back, Liberta-sama,"

Two women who looked like female butlers greeted them in a limousine-type car with a bow.

(Liberta?)

Komako did not know this, but the mysterious and suspicious woman was Dr. Clay's mother, Liberta.

Chapter Seven: The Thing That Hit Me Was Violence Not a Stick

--The day before

“She seems like an interesting girl though...”

Returning from the gathering of the Renzan Queens, Liberta was a little dissatisfied. When she was shown the low-quality information there, Yamada Seina was the person she found most “interesting”. And that was all the more so because he was just as “interesting” as her son Clay, or Washu and Naja whom she met later at the academy. But unfortunately, he was already involved with various people, so she couldn't get any more directly involved, and he had already “grown up”. What's more, he was currently missing.

“Well, that can't be helped. Let's have a little distraction.”

Liberta decided to go through the transfer gate to try and clear her mood.

“I hope I find something interesting.”

Liberta knew how to satisfy her hobbies. She knew where to go not only on Racepshi but in various other places to find what she wanted. It could be people or things, but Racepshi was a place where many people with a wide variety of hobbies gathered and there were many who had used up their budgets and taken their own belongings or things from home to sell for cash, so there were quite a few hidden gems. Sometimes, mere junk turned out to be national treasure-class relics, so for a connoisseur like Liberta, Racepshi was truly a paradise of hidden treasures.

X X X

“...It's almost time.”

After wandering around and picking up lots of loot, Liberta relieved her stress, then transferred it all to the museum and headed off to a certain location.

“What? No contract extension.” Maimu was crying out in despair to a producer at an entertainment agency.

“That's the policy from above. Well, we'll continue to accept submissions, so keep up the good work.”

“The interview with the Princess of Jurai and the first footage of the new Godly Knight got a lot of views, right?”

“That's why I gave you a special bonus, right?” The producer's response was lukewarm.

“No, because...”

“In your case, I'd like you to have a more stable track record. We don't want you to be a one-hit wonder. Well, good work. Come again if you need anything.”

And so, Maimu was denied an extension of her contract and spent the evening in a nearby park. That's when Liberta showed up.

“Ah, there you are. Well then, let's go.”

“Huh? What?!”

Liberta approached Maimu and, without asking, picked her up and started walking briskly. After that, she approached Komako with Maimu still on her back.

Maimu had her eye on the financial building where Komako was based after receiving information from the Renzan Queens. It was a standard route for Liberta's people searches.

“Now this is getting fun.”

Thus, with Maimu and Komako both meeting Liberta's criteria of “looking “interesting”, she returned in high spirits to the museum.

——The present.

The limousine carrying Liberta, Maimu, and Komako started moving from the transfer gate stop, and passed through the large main gate that came into view at the end of the ramp. After driving for about 30 minutes through beautiful nature, with waterfalls and lakes visible through the trees of the forest, the limousine arrived at the port where the Museum was docked.

“Gate 115.”

As the limousine entered the ship, a huge central gate came into view.

“!”

It was a magnificent sight that even Komako, who had seen many extravagant ships belonging to royalty and nobility, found it breathtaking.

Carved out of huge stones, combining different colored stones, and lined with a dozen or so gates carved with various techniques and diverse motifs, it was truly fitting for a ship to be called a Museum.

Komako looked up at the gates one by one as she passed by and let out a breath of admiration.

Passing through the gate, they traveled along the outer perimeter of the ship on a cobblestone road lined with trees. The scenery was magnificent, reminiscent of an ancient city, not to mention its size. And it was probably the gate designated by Liberta, as the

limousine turned off the road into a side street, passed through a gate with a relief of a woman, and entered a circular building.

“!”

Seeing the gate and the shape of the building, Maimu sat up, having been exhausted until then, and stared at it. After entering through an entrance lined with stone pillars covered in ivy, they came to an entrance the size of a large gymnasium, where numerous statues were lined up haphazardly in what at first glance seemed like a warehouse.

“Ah!”

When Maimu saw this, she seemed to have noticed something and let out a cry of surprise.

“Come on.”

Urged by Liberta, Maimu and Komako headed toward the central aisle.

“.....”

The large, unadorned corridor felt more like a corridor-like warehouse than an exhibition space. On both sides, paintings, costumes, decorations and other miscellaneous items were lined up in the cramped space.

(Ah, that's it)

Komako finally understood why Maimu had raised her voice. Everything displayed there was related to Racepshi's dancers. Thinking back, the relief on the gate and the building were modeled after Racepshi and its theaters. And once her attention was focused there, she realized that the statues displayed at the entrance were related to the dancing girls. It was only natural that Maimu, the daughter of Maiko, would be interested in the exhibits there.

“No way... something like this.”

Maimu just muttered those words and continued to stare at the hanging paintings in silence until her feet suddenly stopped in front of one particular painting.

“What?”

Komako was intrigued by Maimu's behavior and peeked at the painting from over Maimu's shoulder.

It was a fairly large painting, depicting a stage scene from one of the oldest theatres in Racepshi, which Komako also knew.

There was only one person, a dancing girl, depicted from behind, and it was a rather plain figure, perhaps to show the scale of the stage. However, Maimu was drawn roughly, and her attention was fixed on the person, who was difficult to identify.

“Come on, let us move on.”

“Huh? Ah, yes.”

Urged by Liberta, Komako followed her, though she was reluctant to do so due to Maimu's condition.

“It's amazing. This is the first time I've seen so many pieces on the theme of Racepshi.”

“This ship contains things collected over the course of 20,000 years.”

“Twenty thousand! That long?”

When Komako heard that number, she understood the results here. It took time to gather such a large collection of items based on a single concept. But she never imagined that the woman in front of her had collected them all.

“This is a collection of objects that have embodied the emotions of many people, both famous and unknown. The emotions of people... that is the history I want to convey, my purpose, and my hobby.”

“People's emotions... Perhaps Maimu-sama was in the painting earlier.”

“I think she felt something, even if it was just an ordinary painting to other people.”

There was silence for a while after that. The moment she heard Liberta's words and became aware of them; the hallway turned into a kind of time tunnel.

It felt as if the passion of the artists imbued in the paintings, sculptures, and decorative objects had taken shape and was speaking to Komako.

“.....Ugh.”

Komako frowned slightly.

The enthusiasm and sadness of the Racepshi Dancers' hearts were conveyed as something dense. But that was merely Komako's impression. Maimu, standing there trembling, must have been feeling different emotions than Komako. But because they were concentrated into one theme, they existed there as something incredibly dense, shaking Komako's sensibilities intensely.

“.....Phew.”

The moment she left the rather long corridor; Komako was released from the dense space and breathed a big sigh. Beads of sweat were forming on her forehead, and she felt mentally exhausted.

At the end of the passage was a dome-shaped rest area that was slightly larger than the main entrance. There were several entrances to the passages around it like the ones seen earlier, and this seemed to be the center of them all.

“Come on over here.”

Liberta urged Komako to sit on the sofa in the lounge. The two female butlers who had come to greet her earlier approached and poured cold tea into glasses on the table. Komako was thirsty due to her nervousness, so although she felt it was a little indecent, she gulped down about half a glass in one go.

“Hou.”

She couldn't help but sigh, but the cold tea helped her calm down.

“This is for you.”

Once Liberta had seen that Komako had calmed down, she gave instructions to the other female butler.

She then placed a tray with a jet-black bracelet on it in front of Komako.

“Credit ring...”

It was a plain bracelet with no other decorations, with only the name and design of the financial company engraved in gold letters on a jet-black background, but if Komako's memory served her right, it was definitely a top-ranked Black Credit Ring officially issued by Racepshi. However, it was not something that could be given to just anyone. It was a ring of a rank that even Sansui and the others could not possess.

“..... This is for me?”

The word “inappropriate” was the perfect word for it, and Komako gulped and stared at Liberta, seeing that it was not something that Komako should have in her hands.

“You sighed in that place, so that's something you need, right? Once you complete the procedure at the specified place, you can use it however you like up to the limit.”

“The upper limit!”

Basically, there was no upper limit to a Black Ring. What Liberta was saying was outrageous.

“You're saying that to someone you just met before even asking who I am or what I'm going to use it for...

It seemed unlikely that someone who had been set up like this could be committing fraud. However, there was the possibility that they may be involved in some kind of outrageous national-level conspiracy.

“Hehe. No matter what you use it for, I don't care if you withdraw it all and run away. Whether it be you or someone else... How it is used in the future, what kind of impact will it have... I just want to see it.”

“You just want to see it...”

She was speechless. Of course, it was possible that she was just teasing her, but if she used the black ring just for that purpose, it would affect Liberta's credibility. That's how serious the issuance of the black ring was. Of course, counterfeiting it could result in the maximum sentence.

“Could it be the hobby you mentioned earlier? If so, that's too much...”

“People often say that I'm being unreasonable, you know? But I have an eye for people. After seeing what's happened so far, I understand what kind of person you are.”

“Even if you say that much, we've only been together for a few hours.”

“That's good enough for me.”

No matter what she said, she would smile unwillingly. If she was a con artist, she was top-notch. She could be a spy from another country who was trying to cause chaos in Renza. But Racepshi was certainly a place where these kinds of crazy hobbies, the kind you'd find in stories, gathered.

(But...Sansu-sama and the others need this.)

At worst, she’d be caught or be humiliated.

“Whether or not you use it is up to you. Just keep it as a talisman.” Liberta's words were the final push.

“...I understand. I'll be grateful to borrow it.”

X X X

After meeting with Liberta, Komako was sent back to the transfer gate at the end of the line.

“Haaah...”

Komako finally felt free and relaxed. She felt as if she had been tricked by a fox or a tanuki, or that she had encountered a parade of demons. She and Maimu had only parted ways in that passage, but from the looks of things, she would probably continue staring at that painting for a while.

More importantly...

“... I'm sorry to bother you when you're busy. There's something I want to confirm.”

She then contacted Sodia, the friend she had met earlier.

“..... What? Hey!”

As soon as she showed her the ring she was wearing to explain, Sodia's monitor went black and only audio was displayed.

“Um, Sodia? Is there a communication problem?”

“If the ring is real, you can use the direct teleportation route, so go and see for yourself!”

Sodia's tone was a little angry, but then she quickly lowered her voice and continued.

“And let me warn you, don't tell anyone else about this, not even Mahaku. Don't tell anyone else. Got it? And I didn't see anything. Got it? Forget that you contacted me!

With that, communication was terminated.

“So...Sodia?”

Seeing this unusual behavior, she reflexively stopped her hand that was about to reconnect the call.

“.....”

She suddenly looked back and saw a large ship anchored on the other side of the hill. Komako calmed down a little and, “I guess I'll just have to go and see.”

Muttering that, she entered the transfer gate using the black ring as a key.

“Welcome back, Komako...?”

A few hours later, Komako returned home, expressionless. She walked straight up to Takuma, as if she hadn't heard Sansui's words, and whispered something to him. Takuma's face instantly turned pale.

“Sansui, I'm sorry, but I'll have to borrow Komako-san.” Takuma said curtly, and the two headed for the reception room.

“It seems that something has happened.”

“The fact that she took Takuma with her... it's probably something she can't tell us about due to financial reasons.” Sensing the unusual atmosphere, Rotsuka also said to admonish Jikki and Sansui.

“There's no need to worry. I understand.”

Because Sansui was forced to do work for his brothers that couldn't be made public, there were things he couldn't tell Rotsuka, Jikki, or Komako. This was definitely one of those stories.

X X X

Entering the reception room and activating her shield, Komako finally breathed a sigh of relief. There were a few tears in her eyes.

“Are you okay? Please sit down. I'll bring you some tea.”

Takuma stopped Komako, who was about to say something, and took out a metal bottle of cold tea and handed it to her. When Komako was preparing the tea for guests, she would bring a glass along with it, but when it was just a close group like Takuma and his friends, it was okay to just drink it straight from the bottle. It felt a little silly to ask a woman like Komako to do that, but in the current situation, it seemed like the better option.

“Thank you.”

Komako accepted it and began to drink.

“So? What happened?”

“Takuma-sama, are you aware of a private bank called MMR?”

“Eh? MM... Ah, ahh?!”

For a moment, Takuma looked puzzled and didn't understand what it meant, but then the name suddenly reminded him, and his face turned pale.

“Hey, wait a second! Where did you get that name?”

After double-checking that the shield was activated, he still seemed uneasy as he leaned close to Komako and spoke to her in a low voice.

“Actually……”

Komako explained in as much detail as she could about what had happened up to that point.

“Wow... Seriously?”

Takuma looked unusually flustered and held his head. He took several deep breaths to calm himself down, then took out the same bottle he had given to Komako and drank the rest in one gulp. As he did so, he frantically tried to process the situation in his head.

“So?”

“I went to their bank office, and they told me that they had a maximum limit on my account... and the bank employee said that they could provide me with an unlimited loan on top of that...”

Perhaps Takuma's panic caused a flashback of her memory, as Komako's body began to tremble as she explained.

“Komako-san, just calm down. ..... I know it's not easy, but just take a deep breath, deep breath.”

After being advised by Takuma, Komako took several deep breaths. Now that she had someone to share her troubles with, she felt a little more at ease and her body seemed to calm down.

“As far as I know, MMR is a bank with an inexhaustible amount of assets, far more than any other bank, even including Renza. That bank... is quite unique, so you never hear their name inside Renza, but on Racepshi, you can use the highest-level facilities for an unlimited period of time just by being a member of MMR. On top of that, it seems you can withdraw currency points issued by Racepshi without any limit. I've heard that in the past they've even rented out Racepshi, so that must be quite something.”

“Private use? Ah!”

The image of his friend Sodia's panicked state flashed through Komako's mind.

“Could it be...?”

“If anyone finds out that you are a member of MMR, you will be swarmed, and it will be very difficult to control. To be honest, I thought it was just some kind of urban legend..... I'll be damned if I'm going to let them see this.”

The upper limit of the black ring that Liberta gave her easily exceeded the annual revenue of Mahakuten, where Takuma was from. Furthermore, it could be used as a guarantee to allow unlimited withdrawals from MMR. At the very least, it was enough money to run a nation.

“There are people out there who can do this sort of thing... hahaha.”

“When I saw this amount, I remembered her words: 'You can just withdraw the whole amount and run away, right?' and I was shocked.”

“That's a really frightening thing to say....to call something like that a hobby really makes you a monster.”

“I asked about this person through MMR, but they didn't tell me anything about her background. They told me not to worry because there was nothing shady about her. However...”

“However?”

“’Well, that's just the kind of person she is’, she said with a smile...”

“...Yeah, well...I guess so.”

There were probably a lot of extremely wealthy people among the members of MMR. Even so, when the staff who have seen such members refer to them as “people like that”, it was incomprehensible to Takuma and his friends to even guess at what they were like. That being said, even what Komako has said up until now was incomprehensible.

“Anyway... thank you, Komako-san, I was able to overcome the most difficult hurdle.” Takuma straightened up and bowed deeply.

“N-No way! It was just a coincidence... I'm the one who ended up pushing all this trouble onto you. I also believe that these encounters were the result of your participation, Takuma-sama. And the hard part is yet to come.”

“Yes, that's true. If she's the kind of person who can just come up with that amount of money, then surely everyone knows what she's doing. And the people who are going along with it are probably the same kind, so it's like she's in the public eye.”

Perhaps Liberta was not the only one, but it was possible that many above-the-clouds individuals were watching Takuma and his group's movements.

“So this is the price of being a spectacle... If we're not careful, we could easily destroy ourselves.”

“So what are we going to do about it?”

An amount equivalent to a national budget... An issue that should be discussed by thousands of government officials, experts, and politicians was being shouldered by just two people. It was only natural to feel at a loss if you had common sense.

“Now, the question is...”

“Ah! That's right, the pamphlet I received...”

Normally, it would seem that a company brochure would not be a solution to the current situation, but Komako felt like she was grasping at straws.

“Pamphlet?”

Takuma also looked at the monitor that had turned on, thinking that it might make a good topic of conversation since it was the famous MMR pamphlet.

“……Yeah?”

Takuma, however, immediately looked at it with a serious expression on his face.

“Oh, oh, oh! I see, I see!”

Takuma smiled as he read the pamphlet.

“What's wrong?”

“That means MMR has a really good understanding of the personalities of their customers.”

“What?”

“In other words, just like you, there are many people who find themselves caught up in the extraordinary hobbies of others. For those people, there are specific countermeasures in place.”

Takuma enlarged the FAQ. This was not something you would expect to find in an ordinary bank.

“First, I want you to open some links with your access rights, and then I want you to give me permission to view them.”

“Understood. Now, put your hand on this ring.”

Takuma touched the ring to perform biometric authentication. After that, she opened some links according to Takuma's instructions.

“...Yeah, yeah, we can do it!”

“Takuma-sama?”

“The first thing we need to do is conceal the source of our funds. The amount we need is enormous.”

The most effective way to disrupt their activities was to cut off their funding sources. In particular, what Takuma was trying to do was tantamount to an act of hostility towards Santen, so it was natural to expect interference.

“However, given the amount of money involved in this case, won't it be impossible to avoid being identified?”

“So we disguise it as an investor. Of course, the original capital is money that Komako borrowed.”

“Are you trying to conceal the source? But who would be willing to undertake something like that...?”

“They can also introduce us to people who can lend us the names of investors for that purpose! MMR is a bank over there, but it's amazing how they have secured a strong route that doesn't impede the flow of funds even within the bank.”

Looking at the list, Takuma had a big grin on his face. His grin was like that of a threatening beast, baring his teeth, and it made him seem like a member of the Magiyoku.

“What's this?”

Takuma showed Komako a list.

“Honestly, the list on Jurai's side is full of people I've never heard of, but the list on Renza's side is full of people I know. You've heard of these people before, Komako-san, right?”

“Yes, certainly... yes...”

“Haha. They're quite eccentric people.”

Neither Takuma nor Komako would say it explicitly, but the people on the list were... well, they were all sorts of eccentrics, oddballs, or stubborn villains.

“But... if it's these people...”

“They certainly won't mind the interference from Santen. On the contrary, they're the type of people who are happy to pick a fight. They're the kind of people who will be amused by what we're trying to do, and who make you think they'll even invest in us.”

“I'm sure that's the case, but... are these people also MMR?”

“Probably... Well, this cover is just insurance in case we get caught. Ideally, it would have been better if no one knew about it. It would be bad if they found out how much money we have. So we'll have to cover our operating expenses with our own personal assets.”

“Then I'll just do it as usual, right?”

“That's right. Basically, you can think of this matter as being out of your hands, Komako-san. From now on, each of us will have a secretary, but I'd like to ask Komako-san to continue as Sansui's secretary.”

“I've got it”

Komako seemed genuinely happy to be relieved of her responsibilities.

“Just……”

Takuma's expression became a little stern.

“One thing that worries me is that friend of Komako-san's... What do you think?”

She was the only person who knew that Komako had come into contact with MMR.

“There is a confidentiality agreement, and I think it is unlikely that she would leak any information, but… with Santen involved, I honestly don’t know. It was really thoughtless of me.”

“No, no, no! If you don't know, that's the natural response. I'd rather hire her as my financial secretary.”

“Yes, that might be a good idea. I'll get her in touch with you right away.”

After Komako left Liberta’s Museum, Maimu had been staring at the painting until she was shown the ridiculous numbers on her MMR account. She didn't move a muscle, and just stared as if she had forgotten to blink. But tears were flowing endlessly from her eyes, and the tears were running down her cheeks.

“Are you curious about that picture?”

Watching Maimu from a distance, Liberta naturally spoke to her, trying to sense her mood.

“.....”

Maimu tried to speak, but could only move her mouth slightly. She understood what Liberta was asking, but she couldn't form any words, as if she had forgotten how to speak.

“The artist of that painting is---”

Liberta whispered softly to Maimu.

“...Dancing Princess of the Wind.”

Maimu managed to squeeze out her voice as if she had been released from sleep paralysis.

The artist of the painting was generally unknown, but her name was known to the dancers of Racepshi.

This was because the painter was nicknamed “Dancing Princess of the Wind “and only painted pictures of wandering dancing girls.

Many people who aspired to become performers gathered on Racepshi. But just as many gave up on their dreams and left. But sometimes, among those who left, there were some who went on to become known even on Racepshi. Princess Kazemai's name was recorded on Racepshi as an outstanding performer, and she was treated on an equal footing with Makihi. But...

“This is a painting of how they met.”

“Frist met……”

However, the painting gave off a sense of frustration, the polar opposite of the glory of success.

“But……” Maimu muttered.

All of the paintings by the artist known to the dancers and the general public were ones that conveyed the glory of the Dancing Princess of the Wind (Princess Kazemai). Therefore, it was believed that she and the artist met around that time. No paintings from before that time had ever been found. However, the painting before her was from that period shouldn’t have existed.

“This is the one I commissioned.”

“What?! Seriously?”

Maimu realized what that meant and looked at Liberta in surprise.

“I've lived a fairly long life... I've seen these children. What's here are my precious memories. To others, they may just be records... but I'm glad that you noticed the feelings that went into them.”

“……but!” Maimu cried out in a sad groan.

“But all I can do is the funeral dance! I... I...”

It was a hushed cry, but it was a wailing voice. Her figure seemed to overlap with that of the dancing princess in the painting.

Liberta gently hugged her from behind.

“Then you should go find someone. Someone who can listen to your lament... Someone who can share your pain.”

“...There's no way I could find someone like that...I don't deserve that...”

The tears flowed endlessly, falling onto Liberta's arms as she turned around to face her. However, she paid no attention to them and continued to hold Maimu in her arms.

“Hehehe. It seems to me that you've already come to a conclusion.”

“.....”

“Take your time and look at this painting until you're satisfied. There's plenty of time.”

At Liberta's whisper, Maimu slowly turned back to the painting.

“Hmm, I see... Maimu was blown away by the wind. I see.”

In the Racepshi board room, Ekushito Racepshi muttered with a look of happiness on his face, his eyes fixed on the documents.

“This is no laughing matter! What is the current situation? You should know that better than anyone else, right?”

“That's what a dancing girl is like. She'll do whatever it takes to give the audience her best performance. This time, that purpose was outside of her. That's all.”

“Hmph! Those Maihime are probably all useless now! By the order of Urakage, bring them back immediately!”

The voice on the other end of the line was extremely irritated.

“Whether it fails or not, that is also the way of life of a dancing girl. You can't get in the way of that.”

“You bastard!”

“You have been given the power to dance. You should not leave it to others, but step onto the stage yourself.”

“Don't regret those words.”

With that, the call was cut off, and Ekushito snorted softly in exasperation.

“...That girl is a talented dancer. She will return to the stage when she is ready. She should be more careful not to mess up her own performance than worrying about others.”

As if such a thing were a minor issue, the speed of Ekushito‘s administrative work continued unabated.

Chapter Eight: “It seems like I can never beat my mother...

Clay was in his practical yet elegant office, concentrating on a report on a monitor.

Clay was in a rented office on the floor that oversaw diplomacy and customs for Racepshi, but one of the reasons he was here was because of his companion, Lazana. No matter where Clay went or how hard he tried to get rid of her, Lazana would instantly know his location and follow him around like a ghost. Even though it was a planetary scale ship, within Racepshi, and since he was bound by contract, even Clay couldn't escape from Lazana, who had the advantage of knowing Racepshi. Having given up, Clay decided that he would at least be in a place where she could wear a decent outfit.

“...I wouldn't be able to stand having you around me half-naked like that.”

Lazana changed into appropriate clothing depending on where Clay was going. Sometimes it was neat, sometimes it was seductive, and it created an atmosphere appropriate to the place. Moreover, the places Clay was allowed to be outside of work were usually high-end, members-only entertainment districts with strict security measures in place to prevent information leaks, places for wealthy people who were used to playing and living in luxury. You could imagine what kind of outfits and atmosphere these people would have their

companions wear to places where they didn't have to worry about other people's eyes. But to Clay, it was nothing but a nuisance.

It may seem surprising, but Clay tried to keep himself neat and tidy. As a philosopher, he was often involved in top-secret matters and huge amounts of money were involved. Since a philosopher was at risk at the level of a head of state, being careless about his private life could be fatal. This was especially true when it came to women, and after what happened with his mother and bitter experiences in the past, Clay was particularly wary of women approaching him outside of work, and above all, he didn't like it. A major factor in this was his recent arrest for work-related trouble.

Of course, being a philosopher, ethical judgments were often in a grey area, and it was only natural that he would end up in court, and arrests were not uncommon. But the fact that his memory had been wiped without his knowledge was more serious than the everyday occurrence of arrest. For Clay, it was a source of fear and humiliation, and the fact that one of the causes of his mistake was related to a woman's love affair made Clay lose his composure even more. This was why he had tried to distance himself from Lazana, but all his efforts had been in vain.

“If it's a case of a higher-dimensional lifeform, then this is to be expected. I was a bit nervous though...”

Although he couldn't get rid of her because she was his supervisor under the contract with his employer, he instinctively rejected her and tried to distance himself from her because he found her annoying. However, if he thought about it calmly, it was impossible to escape within the territory of the other party, which was Racepshi. If that had been proven, any unnecessary resistance would be a waste of time and effort.

However, by giving up on resisting, he could see that Lazana maintained a reasonable distance that Clay didn't find bothersome, didn't waste time on conversation, and didn't burden him mentally. At the very least, she was definitely a different breed from the women who usually approached Clay with ulterior motives, interested only in his assets.

“Hmph!”

Feeling ashamed of his own immature assumptions and actions, he almost cried out in surprise.

“?”

For a moment, Lazana's attention was focused on Clay, but when she saw that Clay didn't say anything, she let her attention lapse.

“I should have noticed sooner.”

In a formal office environment, Lazana dressed and behaved appropriately. As a result, Clay could easily ignore her and no longer felt uncomfortable having her around. In a way, this was a testament to her competence.

“Hehe... I guess that's about it.”

For each job, the detailed work process and the necessary expenses, technical fees, patent fees, etc. were added up, and the amount billed increased. Clay enjoyed watching the bills pile up. Even if half of his profit went to his mother's extravagance, for him it was a necessary expense to avoid trouble. Even though it was half the profit, his income was huge every year, and his savings were steadily increasing, so half of his profit was not a big deal if it meant he could avoid using his brain for unnecessary trouble.

“Okay, this is the end of my work here.”

After checking the invoice multiple times and forwarding it to his employer, the full amount was confirmed to be received almost instantly.

“Hmph... If you pay well, you can handle a little trouble...!?”

He turned my attention to Lazana. Normally, there was no way anyone would notice something like that, but it seemed that Lazana sensed it.

“Ugh... I hate to say it, but it was definitely my mistake. I'll just have to be patient until I can move freely again.”

One of the conditions of his release was that he was forbidden from using his personal ship. He was required to report in advance wherever he went, and to contact them at regular intervals. The highest-ranking system under which Clay was monitored was created by the philosophers, so it would not be easy for even Clay to circumvent. However, he had no intention of causing any unnecessary trouble, he just wanted to escape from Lazana's surveillance as quickly as possible. Of course, since his work was finished, he could just leave Racepshi immediately, but he had no immediate work or purpose, and he didn't want to engage in any pointless behavior that would not bring in any money. And so, the reason Clay was here...

“Clay-sama, we have a guest.”

He was waiting for a job offer.

X X X

Another reason for choosing that location was that entry to the area was more strictly regulated than other locations, as the receptionist was the one who negotiated with the outside world. Anyone was welcome on Racepshi if they could pay, but if you couldn't show proper identification you couldn't enter.

And when you asked Clay to do work for you, you had to pay a large deposit as collateral. Of course, if the contract didn't go through, the amount minus the consultation fee was returned, but the only people who could meet those conditions were nations, large corporations, royalty, nobility, or large underground organizations. Here, Racepshi took care of all those hassles, so all he had to pay was the rent, which made it really cheap.

But even before that, it was easy for Clay to find out the identity of the person he was working with. “A snake knows the way”, as the saying goes, and the information network that Clay had built up over a long time exceeded that of Washu and Seto, when it came to the underworld. So he knew the identity of the man in front of him, and his employer. And whether he could pay a sufficient fee for the skills he would impart. In short, the moment he met the man, he had pretty much decided to accept the job.

“What do you think about the Battle of Renza?”

The butler-like man who introduced himself as an envoy from the Renza royal family said after finishing his general greetings.

This was a question to confirm the major difference in opinion between those from the Galactic Federation and those from the Renza Federation regarding large humanoid weapons.

“I don't think so. To begin with, fighting is an inefficient thing in itself. I don't care what my employer thinks. I just provide the technology and goods that are appropriate for their purpose.”

However, there were rare cases where you might not be compatible with the other person. The question-and-answer session they were having was just to confirm one last thing.

“I'm relieved to hear that.”

“And what does your master want?”

“Hmm... can we create an Armored Cavalry that can defeat the Godly Knight?”

“It's not my job to make you win.”

“What do you mean?”

“Your princes have already proven that no matter how powerful a weapon is, it's useless if the pilot is incompetent. If they can work together well, their Armored Cavalry could easily reach the target.”

“I see, that makes sense. So how about assuming that the operators are equal...?”

“It's very vague... but if we're talking hypothetically, it's probably impossible to predict who will win or lose.”

“You're not saying you can win?”

“Pointless arguments are a waste of time and money. You come up with the strategy, and my job is to provide the functionality to realize it. I am an engineer after all.”

“.....”

“The only thing I can say for sure is that I am the only person with the same skills as the one who created the divine warrior, the Yomotsu Ookami.”

That was the final blow to the butler who was still indecisive. After the formal contract was made, Clay was quickly released from Racepshi... or rather from Lazana's supervision.

X X X

“...I'm sure you'll be able to provide the best possible service to your guests.”

In the office of the spaceship that Clay was on, the man was talking to his master. Perhaps out of concern for any leaks, he never mentioned his master's name.

“Everything went smoothly... but I wonder how much of an effect a single woman can have on that man...”

“Is it true that he didn’t change women during his stay in Racepshi?”

“Yes”

It was quite unusual for Racepshi, a palace of entertainment, to continue using the same companion.

“I don't know about dancing girls, but companions are like the clothes you wear every day or the food you eat. You use them differently depending on your mood and the place you're in.”

In particular, the treatment that Clay received was among the best, and while what he said would normally be done, Clay was the type of person who would ask for it in the form of money.

“Hmph, even if that's not the case, it will still be useful.”

“So that's it.”

“Heh heh heh.”

The man who was laughing quietly and his master were unaware of how foolish and mistaken their actions were...

Chapter Nine: Kiriko Activates

“Clear nya!”

“Clear nya!”

“Clear nya!”

The voices of the cat fairies happily flying around the bridge echoed.

No matter how far apart they were, they could connect their consciousness to each other, so they acted as a warning system in the event of an emergency. Of course, detailed emergency information needed to be communicated via hyperspace communication, but they were simply faster at issuing the initial warning.

“All departments are clear.”

“Our cooperation with the Racepshi Security Forces is also going well.”

“However, requests for information disclosure from the media continue to come in nonstop through various channels.... Although the PR department says that all broadcasting rights for this ceremony belong to Racepshi, they are trying to exploit small openings in the private relationships of staff members to obtain information.”

“It's an event of this magnitude, so I understand how they feel. Kaguya also told me that even the lowest ranking mechanic apprentices were contacted... it's really troubling.”

Kiriko and the girls were currently renting one of the Racepshi's event venues. This was a first-class venue that only royalty and nobility could rent, and holding an audience there was an act that made Kiriko's status in Racepshi clear.

However, this was merely a performance for those who only knew the common sense of Renza. Those connected to the Galactic Federation knew that the base within Kamidake, where selected people would head after the ceremony, was a place of far higher status than the venue for the audience. This was because even members of the royal family could not just enter that place if they wished, as it was a mass of secrets built using the secret techniques of the Galactic Academy's highest-ranking philosopher, Hakubi Washu. Even if they came to know this someday, for the time being, this place was a more effective way to inform the people of the Renza of the meaning of Kiriko's existence.

X X X

“What's wrong? You seem unusually nervous.”

Hitoe Ouken, the Water-rank Knight, spoke to the young knight, who was sitting on the gorgeous sofa with his back straight and stiff. It was inevitable in this lounge that the

appearance of a new graduate going for an interview at a large company was out of place, but it was not fitting for the privileged clientele that usually came here.

“Is this definitely the place? Is it okay for me to be here?”

“Yes, there's no mistake. So just relax a little.”

“Even if you say so, I'm so out of place...”

Seeing how extremely tense he looked, Ouken felt sorry for him rather than giving him a wry smile.

“Well, I understand how you feel. I've only been in that corner of the lobby once before.”

Although it was called a lobby, it was more like a huge garden. The elevated area in the center where they were was the space for the main personalities, such as royalty and nobility, and the area around it was for their servants. And beyond that, on the other side of the screen, in the corner, was the waiting area for guards like them.

In Kaou, there was a family name that was only allowed for royal knights, which no longer existed. It used numbers one through eight and the character for rank, and the higher the number, the higher the rank. Of course, even the lowest rank, Hitoe, was still a prestigious family. If Hitoe Ouken felt that way, it was no wonder that young high-ranking knights were so nervous.

“Even so, there’s quite a diverse group of people gathered here.”

Ouken quietly sensed his surroundings, careful not to be rude.

“Some were expelled from the Five Royal Knights, and others were beheaded in that duel. There are also some other strangers... but if a princess from a foreign land is summoning them, it's only natural that the group will be a mixed bunch.”

When the sons of the Five Royal Families became independent, their vassals were distributed among them based on their previous relationships. Either way, if they wanted to start their own families, they would need to have the necessary connections and contacts. However, in Kiriko's case, she was unable to receive full support from Kaou, and she was practically picking a fight with Renza. Moreover, when summoned by a foreign princess, it was only natural that all sorts of people with a gambling mentality would gather.

(But still... it's a bit odd...)

Knights and those of that ilk all had a common air about them, but some had a different smell.

(I mean, his behavior, or rather his gaze.)

“That knight...”

As Ouken pondered this, the young knight frowned slightly. He looked at a figure leaning on the drink bar, drinking heavily. This knight was notorious for his immaturity and poor behavior with women. Although he held the rank of Water Knight, he was shunned by others due to the numerous troubles he caused with women.

The man was calm even among the tense knights, enjoying the expensive-looking alcohol that he normally couldn't afford. It was true that everything at the drink bar was free, and even if he was drunk the alcohol would break down instantly, so Ouken could understand the desire to take this opportunity to drink some high-end or rare alcohol that he normally couldn't afford. However, considering the upcoming ceremony, his behavior was a little inappropriate and damaging to his image.

“Well, he's got a lot of skill. And I want to emulate that kind of boldness.”

“I hope you don't show that boldness to your master, the princess.”

“I hope she's not that unreasonable. But judging from how she fought, there's a high chance she'll be defeated, and above all, her husband is a Godly Knight.”

“Ah, that's... certainly.”

That knight was said to be skilled at riding Armored Cavalry, but his fighting skills were poor, so if he actually did it, he would just be laughed at by everyone for being infatuated and out of his league. In fact, if he did that to a princess of the Jurai royal family, who became more and more powerful the higher they rose, he would be killed instantly.

Perhaps the short conversation had eased some of the tension, as the young knight quenched his thirst with the untouched drink placed in front of him.

“!”

He looked surprised, as if he had been overwhelmed by the delicious taste. That was understandable, as the ingredients used in the drink were quite rare and could not be obtained simply by paying money. If he wanted to taste the same thing again in the future, he would have to spend decades raising his status to reach that level.

“...But changing the subject, I heard that Ouken-dono was involved in the testing of our Armored Cavalry... Of course I have seen the data, but I think it's best to do something like this directly...”

“Well, there are probably many aspects that can't be understood without experiencing it for yourself, and it's something that a knight would be interested in.”

At that moment, the attention of those around him turned to Ouken. Aside from Ouken, there were several other people present who were taking part in the testing of the new knight, but there were many who didn't know any of them and wanted to get as much information as possible.

(Well, they haven't been told to keep it a secret, so it probably doesn't matter to the people gathered here.)

Ouken pretended not to notice and began to speak.

“May I join in the conversation, Hitoe-dono?”

Without anyone realizing it, the frivolous knight who had been drinking at the counter approached them, holding a bottle and glass in his hands.

“Oh, that's fine, Kobek Futasugi-dono.”

With Ouken's permission, Kobek pulled the sofa over to Ouken's side and poured a new glass of sake before handing it to him. Ouken accepted it and only took a quick sip, but if it weren't for this situation, he would have been tempted to drink it all, since it was a drink he had always wanted to try.

“The Sacred Mechalord is an interesting system. It is completely synchronized with the body of each individual knight, so it feels like the Armored Cavalry itself becomes the body of the knight.”

“Oh? So it's a direct link system type?”

“No, Kobek-dono. It’s more mysterious... or rather, more moving. It’s more direct and stress-free than any other Armored Cavalry I have ever piloted. However...”

“So does that mean the abilities of the Armored Cavalry depend on the abilities of the knight?”

“Those are just the abilities of the base unit. Then you add in the brain unit and equipment, so it takes some getting used to and time to adjust... but this is just my impression, but that omnipotence is incredible. It's almost groundbreaking.”

“I see... so where can I access the combat databanks?”

That's what mattered most to Kobek, as he combined that data to create his own unique style of fighting.

“Unfortunately, that's probably only Kaou.”

“..... hmmm. Am I a little early on this one?”

“Well, I wouldn't say that.”

“Oh? That's...”

And at that moment, a staff member announced the meeting.

“There's no need to panic. You'll understand soon enough. In the meantime, you'd better sober up.”

X X X

The main hall was a huge circular crystal dome, and outside, the cathedral of Racepshi could be seen overlooking it. In the middle of a vast garden that looked like a pattern on the endless sea, the cathedral sparkled in the sunlight.

(hey hey……)

It was a building that symbolized Racepshi, which was shown at the opening of New Year's celebrations and other important events. It was unclear whether the scenery was filmed or real, but either way, it was not something that could be easily obtained permission for, and the mere fact that it could be used showed how Racepshi recognized Kiriko's status. It also allowed those who were unfamiliar with the Galactic Federation to visually understand Kiriko's status.

“Ouken-dono...”

Overwhelmed by the atmosphere, the young knight spoke in a trembling voice. But that was how everyone gathered there felt.

“All I know is that she is a princess from a great nation, but considering that Racepshi treats her with the utmost respect, that must be the case.”

Ouken felt that his was an extremely insignificant existence. Just as he was trying to catch his breath and not be crushed by those feelings, the music playing in the venue stopped.

There was complete silence. It was almost frightening.

A plate resembling a shimmering water surface appeared before them, and on it appeared enlarged 3D images of the main staff, the Water-ranked generals. Then, small gasps could be heard all around.

(Kaou is pretty serious about this)

He was a skilled and capable general from Kaou who was known to all knights and their associates.

“!!”

Next were the Heaven-rank generals, Souren and Sajyu, along with two others. At that moment, a murmur arose from the participants. They (one of whom is male) were famous figures who were also knights outside of Kaou. In particular, Souren (?) was so captivating that even those who did not know her (him) cannot help but be drawn in.

Next up were Fuku and D, who, along with the Godly Knight, had become quite famous. Miki and Kirche also exuded a certain atmosphere with their costumes and decorations. And Amane, Ryoko, and Neeju, due to their backgrounds, had a tremendous presence. In

addition to the stage effects, Neeju's ability to control the collective consciousness also added to the atmosphere. And then—

Click, clack, click, clack, click, clack... Impressive footsteps echoed through the air as Kiriko entered from the right side of the stage.

(……Amazing)

Anyone who saw Kiriko walking could tell that her strength was not average. However, in a match, Ouken would likely be able to beat her, and there were many masters who were better than her.

(But in a real fight...)

To be honest, from Ouken's perspective, Kiriko's duel was sloppy in many ways. She was helped in many ways by her opponent's inexperience, and it also felt like she was overwhelmed by the Godly Knight, which she was not used to. There were problems with dueling in that state, but she didn't take any damage. Her handling of the numerous opponents was extraordinary, with no failures whatsoever. And as the duel progressed, her control of the Godly Knight became more and more refined.

The problem was the process, not the result.

The movements of the Godly Knight, Yomotsu Ookami, during the duel were like watching a fast-forwarded process of the pilot's first time piloting it with almost no training, and then several years of training to become proficient. By the end, even Ouken was no match for it.

(The performance of our Armored Cavalry is quite high, but at the same time, there are some concerns. It's difficult to judge them...!)

Just as Ouken was thinking this, Kiriko's footsteps rang out with a loud click, and she stopped in the center of the stage. Then she slowly turned towards them.

“”””!”””

The atmosphere in the place changed instantly.

Everyone there was intimidated by Kiriko, and they were unable to move, as if they were paralyzed. This was a technique that Seto often used, but Kiriko was not yet able to reach that level. That's why she was assisted by Neeju's ability to direct the group consciousness in a certain direction.

“First of all, I would like to express my gratitude for accepting my invitation!”

Kiriko began to speak quietly and solemnly. Combining the results of her short royal education, her experience seeing Emperor Jurai and Seto up close, and the power of Neeju, she used this prestigious place, which intimidated most of the participants, as a stage to

increase her dignity. Above all, this was all to help Seina, and Kiriko's power increased instantly when it came to Seina.

“You have surely heard many rumors about me. I understand that you have doubts and worries. Therefore, I will not hide anything from you, but will reveal everything. And once you know the truth, I will not blame you for leaving.”

“”””?”””

At that moment, the participants, especially the knight candidates, were shaken. They realized that they had suddenly been presented with a test of their faith.

“Let me make one thing clear before we begin. The Galactic Federation is far more powerful than you could ever imagine. Its scale and capabilities surpass those of Renza in every way, including military strength. While the Armored Cavalry is an excellent weapon on its own, without the dueling system, it will inevitably be overwhelmed by sheer numbers. If they are to be effective in single combat, they would need to be Godly Knight-class, but the Galactic Federation has ships of the same class. While it is true that Renza has a slight edge in the technology and know-how of Armored Cavalry, you have seen it with your own eyes or in recorded footage, haven't you? The way the Armored Cavalry, which possesses the same power as Renza's Five Holy Machines, was sliced apart in a duel by the Godly Knights!”

“Ohhh!”

The cause of the uproar was the image of an Earth-based robot anime that was being projected.

“What's that?”

“It's a video I've never seen before, but it's the story of the Armored Cavalry. Do you know it?”

“No, this is the first time I've seen it.”

Those who were present all said so, but it seemed that their curiosity outweighed their doubts.

The major difference between the Galactic Federation and the Renza Federation lay in their differing philosophies regarding combat: the former favored ship-to-ship combat, while the latter favored combat using Armored Cavalry. The Galactic Federation, which prioritized functional efficiency, and the Renza Federation, which worshiped Armored Cavalry as idols, were naturally incompatible.

“It is no wonder that you do not know. This is an entertainment film made on an early civilization planet within the Galaxy Federation's space. That planet is the birthplace of my husband, the pilot of the Godly Knight.”

“Hey! Does that mean the Galactic Federation also has a concept of Armored Cavalry combat?”

The very fact that the Galactic Federation had a knight-like ideology was a shocking event.

“If it's a planet with an early civilization, doesn't that mean Yamada Seina is the only one? If it's an early civilization, then something like that might be possible.”

“At the very least, that princess had the concept of Armored Cavalry combat in mind from the beginning.”

It was difficult to deal with a combat concept with a different philosophy. It was one thing to fight against it, but developing weapons and engaging in combat was extremely difficult. No matter how advanced science was, it took a long time to develop and collect combat data, and the same went for pilots. However, even if it was an entertainment video, if the concept was familiar, progress would be much faster than starting from scratch. Moreover, on planet Earth was Hakubi Washu, one of the leading scientists in the Galactic Federation. With the incident with Masaki Kenshi in mind, she gleefully created the God of Destruction, Yomotsu Ookami.

“And the scientific knowledge of the Galactic Federation is far superior to that of Renza. As proof of this, the protection of all the Brain Tree units we have defeated has been completely deactivated.”

“Ohhhh...”

A murmur rose from the entire venue. Although it had been expected, the significance of Kiriko stating the fact aloud was considerable. It clearly meant that Santen was now an enemy, and remaining there would mean agreeing with that decision. However, strangely, no one thought to leave the venue.

In the first place, those who had the talent but were treated poorly in Renza had gathered in the hope of breaking out of that environment, so they were somewhat prepared to become enemies of Santen. Of course, the presence of the Godly Knight ZINV and Kiriko's Yomotsu Ookami, who showed overwhelming power, also played a major role. If they could develop the Armored Cavalry, especially the Brain Tree, without relying on Santen, there would be no need for them to bow down to Santen. And it was the numerous productions created by Kiriko and her team that made them consider leaving Santen, which was in a sense taboo.

“From now on, you will no longer be able to receive maintenance from Santen... In the first place, we have no intention of entrusting our precious family to those who wield such immature technology!”

Behind Kiriko and her team, a new type of Seikijin the size of Yomotsu Ookami appeared.

“Ohhhh!”

An even louder cheer erupted from the venue. The presence of the actual Armored Cavalry and the interest and anticipation they generated were indeed impressive.

“This new Armored Cavalry is the latest creation of the scientist who created my Godly Knight, Yomotsu Ookami. Depending on how well it works with the installed Brain Tree system, it has the potential to rival the Yomotsu Ookami!”

“Cooperation, huh?”

In contrast to the excitement of the venue, Kobek gazed at the new model with a cool eye. However, he noticed something and quietly approached Ouken amid the excitement of the venue.

“Ouken-dono, I'd like to follow-up on the discussion we had earlier, is that okay?”

“Is this the one that can only use Kaou’s data?”

“Because it's important to me. Is there something going on?”

Kobek was thinking of leaving if there was nothing to be done. As if reading his thoughts, Ouken kept watching the stage.

“Ah, it's the vast amount of data on human-to-human combat that Jurai possesses. If I say it's the data that the princess showed in her duel, you'll know what I mean, right?”

“I see, I see.”

Before long, Kobek's face was lit up with joy.

X X X

“Oh come on, that's pretty stirring.”

The young man muttered while folding his arms and smiling cynically. He didn't seem to be in tune with the atmosphere in the venue, but there was an air of excitement.

“That princess has quite an impressive presence. I can see why she was feared over there. I like her.”

The short-haired woman had a grin on her face, baring her fangs, and a well-trained physique.

“.....”

The third person, in contrast to the others, was small and at first glance looked like a young girl. She was silent as she looked at the Armored Cavalry.

The three of them were lined up in the knight's section, but unlike the other knights, they had a relaxed atmosphere about them.
However, the people gathered here were a diverse bunch, to say the least, due to Kiriko's broad recruitment criteria, and some might even say they were a motley crew. As a result,

they didn't stand out too much, but they were still somewhat out of place. But that was to be expected, as they were pirates from Renza's anti-government faction, known as the “Freedom League”, that Maya and her sister had discussed. Of course, Kiriko and the others were well aware of this.
“Hmm? Hey, what do you think? You're always the loudest when it comes to anything involving Armored Cavalry.”

The young man silently placed his hand on the head of the woman, who was the height of a young girl.

“……Cute”

“Hmm?”

The young man and the short-haired woman seemed a little surprised by the petite woman's murmur.

“So cute! Those kids are so cute!”

The petite woman gazed at the Armored Cavalry with moist eyes, as if she were looking at her favorite idol.

“...Oh, so that means it's the real thing, right?”

“If that's what she says, then it must be true. It seems like it was worth the trouble to come here.”

X X X

Kiriko's speech continued.

“I have no intention of asking for your loyalty! Your status or origin doesn't matter! However, all who choose to gather here and remain here will have a chance! Come, all of you who have gathered here. Use your own strength and talent to win the throne!”

Kiriko's words caused the excitement of those gathered there to reach its peak.

Neither status nor origin mattered. If one demonstrated their abilities, the Armored Cavalry, which could reach the heavens and even the Godly Knights, could become theirs.

Chapter Ten: The One Who Brings About an Unusual Encounter...

Planet Abaryum.

Dusk had fallen in the town where Seina lived. It was around four in the afternoon, but the town was already quiet, with few people passing by. Smoke from cooking rose from the houses where people lived, indicating that even in the quiet town, people were still busy.

“Hehe.”

Looking out at the view from the second-floor window, Seina unconsciously smiled.

Seina liked this view. The life cycle of the town was different from the 24-hour world of the universe, and was similar to that of his hometown and Masaki Village. Because they earned their living from agriculture and the bounty of the Magic Tree Forest, the rhythm of their life, going to bed and waking up according to the cycle of the sun, gave Seina a sense of stability and peace of mind. More than anything, the sense of security that came from having a place to live made the melancholy of twilight feel comfortable.

“Thank you for your hard work, Seina-sama.”

Nana came up the stairs, his footsteps making a soft thump thump. In his case, his footsteps made no sound when he walked normally, so he made noise to let people know he was there.

“Oh Nana, thank you for your hard work. They’re filled up now so you can take them.”

He turned to look at the open case on the table , which contained about 150 5mm magic crystals that had already been refilled with magic energy.

“All of them?... It seems the crystallization of your magical organs has progressed again. How's your temperature?”

“There seems to be a little bit, but it's not enough to cause any problems.”

When magic was used, it put a strain on the magical organs, and if a large amount of magical energy was used, the liquid magical crystal would become crystallized due to the overload. This would dramatically increase the amount of magical energy that could be stored, and the higher the crystal density, the greater the amount.

As crystallization progressed, the magic organ began to grow again to increase its capacity, but for normal humans, regrowth was rare after the initial growth of their magic organ. However, Seina had access to the Magic System, and he was constantly using high-level magic, which he used to refill a large number of magic crystals. And since Nayuta was up to various things even while Seina was sleeping, the crystallization of his magic organ was progressing rapidly. So, as if competing with that, his magic organ was also working hard to increase its capacity.

“...And we need to reduce our debt a little.”

For Seina, who couldn't go hunting in the Magic Tree Forest, recharging magical energy in the magic crystals was an important source of income. He could have earned more if Nayuta released the materials he was saving, but for now he has no choice but to wait.

“...Yes, indeed. And your master has called for you.”

After checking the number of magic crystals, Nana closed the lid and headed towards the stairs as if to guide Seina.

X X X

“Yeah, good job. You can fill up this amount in such a short time, kid, you could live off this for the rest of your life, Gahahaha!”

Barigaru nodded in satisfaction as he opened the case he received from Nana. In fact, the energy infrastructure made up of magic crystals was increasing year by year, and with that came an increase in the demand for magic crystals to be filled with magic energy.

“Hahaha... Is there anything else I can help you with?”

To be honest, Seina liked it here, and if only various problems could be resolved, he would even be happy to live here with Kiriko and the other girls.

—Kiriko-san in particular seems like she would be very happy.

The life of an adventurer here was surely the one Kiriko desired and dreamed of. Despite the issues with her main job, Spirit Thread Teleportation made it easy to travel here and back.

“Ah, about that. Training starts tomorrow, right? Well, I thought I'd celebrate your graduating from hunting pittos. Let's go out for a meal somewhere nice, and of course I'll treat you, hahahaha.”

“Thank you very much.”

At that moment, Seina noticed that Barigaru had a strange look on his face. He glanced over at Nana, only to see him, expressionless, with an indescribable aura, hurriedly take the case containing the magic crystals and disappear into the back of the room.

“Well, you'll understand when you get there. You'll have a good meal there, so look forward to it.”

Perhaps sensing Seina's wariness, Barigaru said only that and stopped the conversation.

“.....Understood.”

“Nana! I'll leave the rest to you.”

X X X

He followed Barigaru outside and it was a bit chilly because the sun had set. They were chatting and heading towards the building where the Hunting Adventurer's Guild was located.

《Seina, look up.》

“What's that?”

Seina looked up to the sky in response to Nayuta's warning.

“What’s wrong?”

A little later, Barigaru looked in the same direction as Seina, and saw several faint lights that were not stars moving.

“Shit! Pirates, huh.”

“Pirates!”

《Ten Earthly Knight-class Armored Cavalry have entered the atmosphere. Predicted destination is...》

“... Hmph! Well, it looks like the alarm didn't go off, so I guess this isn't the target.”

After saying that, Barigaru looked back as if he was no longer interested and started walking again. Seina quickly followed him; his eyes still fixed on the sky.

“Barigaru-san? Pirates... What do you mean by an alarm?”

“Pirates are criminals who live in space. They regularly descend to planets to plunder. The Magic Element corrodes machinery, so it's better that they can't build bases on the ground... Actually, there should be a military base belonging to a high rank group like the people of Ouka on this planet.”

“Huh? And...”

“Yeah, it's pointless expecting anything from them. They used to be better, but since the current commander took over, it's been terrible.”

“Huh? But pirates don't build bases on land because of machine corrosion, so why is there an Ouka base here?”

“There are no magic trees on the continent where the base is located. If we completely eradicate the magic trees in a certain area and bring in the machines, the magic trees will stop growing and the magic energy will disappear. Then the machines will not rot.”

“I see... So the alarm comes from that base?”

“No, this town is protected by a magical barrier. It predicts the pirates' course and sounds an alarm. I think I mentioned that before. It's a system set up by a talented pervert.”

Although Barigaru had been showing signs of displeasure, his mood gradually returned to normal after the topic of talented perverts came up.

“Ah... yeah, now that you mention it, I've heard that story.”

“When the alarm sounds, the residents will flee underground. The pirates can't get in there, and even if they do come down, the pirates' handheld weapons can be countered with

magic. Well, the surface area may be destroyed, but the best assets are underground, ha ha ha!”

“Is the defense system in place outside of this city similar?”

“It's not as bad as here. That said, the extent of the damage varies, but for now, every town is being ravaged. The commander of Ouka base has been replaced, so all we can do is hope that the new one is a little more reasonable.”

“Aren't you going to discuss this with Ouka?”

If they had no intention of defending this place in the first place, they wouldn't have gone to the trouble of building a base, but it may be just for the purpose of asserting their territorial claims.

“I’ve said this many times before, but bases on planets with magic trees like this are like penal colonies for the humans in space. Their goal is to finish their work without any problems and then go back into space.”

“Are there no pirate attacks on that Ohka base?”

“Even though it's rotten, it's still a military base, so if they fight honestly, the pirates will suffer heavy losses. They won't do anything that won't make them money.”

“I see.....”

As a GP member, Seina felt uneasy, but if they made a wrong move, this planet could become a battlefield. In the first place, the destructive power of the Royal Tree Unit without its armor was too strong. No matter how much they tried, it could easily destroy half of the planet.

《It's going to be hard to leave this planet.》

《Well, first I have to do something about my debt.》

That being said, Seina liked living here. Although he was concerned about Kiriko and the others, he felt a strong desire to stay here a little longer.

Chapter Eleven: A Ryotei Is a Place of Intrigue...

(TN: A Ryotei is a high-end Japanese restaurant)

While they were chatting, Barigaru and Seina came across a street lined with shops selling luxury goods. If they were going to the Hunting Adventurer's Guild, they would have just crossed the street, but this time they continued along the street and turned into a small side street.

《A dead end?》

《There's a gap at the end big enough for one person to pass through.》

A little way back there was a hedge that jutted out from the other side, and they made our way in a zigzag pattern. It looked like some kind of hideaway, but when the hedge ended there was an archway in a slightly open space.

“Hmm?”

The arch was made of wooden pillars and a transom woven from a bamboo-like plant, probably a type of magic tree; to Seina, it felt familiar.

“You said it was a nice place, so it's a bit of a hidden inn.”

Feeling the mysterious atmosphere, as they passed through the arch, he saw a staircase leading underground in front of him, which he descended following Barigaru.

《What is this?》

For a moment, Seina had the illusion that he had returned to Earth.

When he went down into the basement, he found himself in a hall designed to resemble an old wooden Japanese restaurant.

““Welcome””

The two women at the counter bowed deeply to Barigaru. They were wearing traditional Japanese kimono, hakama, and a large maid-like apron, giving them a Taisho-era feel. (TN: 1912-1926)

《What do you think?》

《It could be a coincidence, but it's definitely a design you won't see in this town. And the writing on the lantern...》

《Is it funny?》

The lanterns, made of thin wood and covered with cloth, had the name of the shop written in small, cursive letters. It was not a large signboard for advertising, but rather gave the impression of a hidden inn that did not welcome first-time customers, like a long-established high-class restaurant, with a sense of refinement and modesty.

“Please take this one.”

Two other women came from the back, holding costumes in their hands, and dressed Barigaru and Seina in slightly long, white Happi coats with a navy-blue striped pattern.

After getting dressed, the four of them saw them off and they headed to the end of the hall. It seemed to be a gate for spiritual thread teleportation, and a moment later, in front of

them was a three-story wooden building that looked very similar to an old Japanese inn, lit up with many lanterns hanging from it.

“It's quite a nice atmosphere, isn't it?”

Indeed, as Barigaru said, the scenery floating in the sunset deep in the woods was a landscape that seemed even more otherworldly than the rest of this strange world. The Japanese-style scenery in particular gave Seina an even more unfamiliar feeling.

《This feels really weird... It's kind of creepy. Maybe I've been abducted by a god or something?》

This city was often built with stone quarried from underground, and although some parts used materials from magic trees, he had never seen an entirely wooden structure.

《It has a certain charm.》

《That's true... But what do you think of this design?》

《There's not enough information right now. Maybe there are cities with a similar design on other continents, and buildings are made with materials that are easily available in the area, so it's possible that the design could be similar depending on the building materials used.》

《Well, I guess that's the more reasonable way to think about it...》

This planet was probably several hundred light years away from Earth. It was impossible for humans from Earth to have traveled to space and come to Renza. It was more reasonable to think that the designs were coincidentally similar.

“Come on, it's time to go in.”

Urged by Barigaru, Seina followed him.

“?”

At that moment, Seina felt something touch his face, and he felt a slight tingling sensation, like static electricity. He reflexively visualized the magical energy and tried to figure out what it was.

《Maybe it's some kind of sensor? It doesn't seem to be harmful though.》

What emerged from there was something resembling a spider web woven with magical threads. It was hanging down around Seina's face, but Barigaru, who was walking in front of him, didn't seem to notice.

《They're posted here and there... Maybe they're some kind of sensor.》

《Maybe it's some kind of warning device, because it's a place like this.》

However, it would be creepy to get caught like that, so he easily avoided it and moved forward.

“Welcome, please come in.”

Once he entered, he was greeted by hostesses in the spacious entrance hall.

“Here you take off your shoes and change into indoor shoes.”

Seina had seen it before, without Barigaru explaining. He took off his sandals and put on the slippers that were lined up. The waitress took his sandals and carried them away.

“Please come this way.”

Led by the hostess, Barigaru and Seina followed her into the back room.

《The inside of the building also feels like an old, traditional Japanese inn or restaurant. 》

《But even so...》

Avoiding the occasional magic sensor, he climbed the stairs and headed to the top floor.

《I can sense the presence of people, but why haven't we passed any other customers, let alone any employees?》

《The structure of the building is designed so that you never pass anyone else. Perhaps it's to create the feeling that you're the only ones in the building, but in any case, it's to make it feel special and out of the ordinary. There are times when you don't want people to see each other, after all.》

《I see... so that's what it's used for.》

Seina was also involved with Seto and Airi, so he had experience being invited to places that required high levels of secrecy.

As they walked from the main building through the corridor to the detached building built on the cliff, he could see several corridors and the detached buildings connected to them.

《It seems like a pretty good place, but... Is it okay to treat me?》

It was clear that they were being shown to a special room. There were likely guest rooms in the main building, but they were being taken to a separate building, so there was no doubt about that.

《I hope this doesn't add to my debt.》

《I really hope that's not the case.》

At the end of the corridor, they took off their slippers at the wide step and went up to the anteroom.

《Tatami... right?》

《Tatami...》

Both Seina and Nayuta stopped thinking.

《Yeah, this feels good.》

The look and feel of the tatami were just like real tatami. If he had any complaint, the only thing that was different was the smell. He was impressed by the feeling after such a long time,

“Please wait inside.”

The hostess knelt down and opened the sliding door.

“Hey, sorry to keep you waiting.”

Barigaru entered the room, greeting the occupant casually.

(Is anyone else here? Barigaru-san seems to be on friendly terms with them...)

He bowed slightly to the hostess and entered the room, which was a Japanese-style room about 10 tatami mats in size. The moment he turned toward the person sitting at the sunken kotatsu table in the center,

“Boohoo!”

If he had had anything in his mouth, it would have been a disaster, with liquid spraying out of his mouth and nose. The moment he saw the woman's face; Seina couldn't help but burst out laughing.

“What? What's wrong kid?”

“No... nothing...”

Seina was desperately trying to hold back his laughter,

《Hahahaha haha! What? What's that weird face? It's so weird.》

Nayuta was laughing out loud in his head, completely thwarting Seina's efforts.

But that couldn't be helped. After all, the woman's face had swirls on her cheeks, large, unnaturally drawn eyelashes, the character for “meat” written on her forehead, and a moving Kaiser mustache. If you were to see that on first sight, it would be impossible to resist.

(Hmm?)

At that moment, Seina felt something was off. Barigaru remained calm in the face of such a bizarre sight.

(No way!)

Seina immediately released the magical energy from his vision. Sure enough, the gag makeup had vanished, revealing a beautiful face. But it was already too late.

“Heh heh heh heh heh heh.”

The woman's expression turned into a nasty smile.

(.....Ugh!)

That smile was far more sinister than the comedy makeup from earlier; it was almost evil, as if Airi, Airi, and Airi were up to some evil scheme.

《..... Something tells me it's over.》

As Nayuta's laughter echoed in his head, Seina gave up thinking.

“Come on, young man, don't just stand there, come in.”

It was a beckoning to hell.

“...the reason I brought you here today was to introduce you to this...”

Seina sighed softly as he entered the room as Barigaru told him to. As the hostess quietly closed the sliding door behind him, Seina felt as if he was locked in a cage with a wild animal. Of course, that wasn't just his imagination.

Chapter Twelve: Oh, matchmaking?

The woman looked at Seina and gestured across from her.

Seina sat in the front, and Barigaru sat in the middle. Well, now that they'd come this far, there was no way he could run away. Seina obediently complied.

“Boy, this is Jovia Jovis. She is the wizard who serves the lord of this city, and as I may have said before, she is a talented pervert.”

“Nice to meet you. I'm Jovia Jovis, and who is this talented pervert!?”

Well, the conversation began with the usual jokes.

“N-nice to meet you, I'm Seina.”

“Well, now that we’ve said our hellos, I'll leave you two youngsters to it.”

Jovia waved her hand dismissively at Barigaru, urging him to leave.

“What do you mean you two youngsters! The little boy, yes, but I’m a thirty-year-old divorcée with a child.”

“Beard, don't say anything unnecessary! A chubby guy with glasses and a cheating wife is waiting over there, so you can do it from behind or in front! Shhh! Shhh!”

She quickly revealed her true nature, though she didn't seem to be trying to hide it.

“That's why your husband, who is known as the embodiment of kindness, ran away, saying, 'I'm sorry, I can't do this anymore.'“

“Shut up! It's none of your business!”

“Hahaha! Kid, be careful because she's like this.”

“Beard!”

Before Jovia, whose face was red, could raise her arms and stand up, Barigaru opened the sliding door and ran away. For the time being, it seemed the opening act was over.

“Hey kid, if she does anything to you, tell me. If you do, I'll tell her daughter, hahahaha.”

When Barigaru said this while closing the sliding door, Jovia stopped moving abruptly.

“Damn it, next time I'll rip out all of your beard, so remember that!”

Perhaps the girl that Barigaru spoke of was her weak spot, and Jovia, though disgusted, gave up on chasing him.

“Hmm? Wait a sec... instead of plucking them out, maybe we should make an upside-down A-shaped moustache... hehehehe.”

“.....”

“Oops, excuse me, excuse me.”

Perhaps noticing Seina's shock, Jovia suddenly smiled elegantly. Her acting style was just like Airi's.

“You'll have a hard time with that money-grubbing guy, won't you? If you want to default on your debt and run away, I'll help you.”

“No, ... That's not the way it works.....”

“Really? Well, if you get tired of it, just let me know. I'll be happy to help you put an end to your fate. But more importantly, I'm hungry.”

Jovia clapped her hands to call the waitress, ordering her to bring their meals.

First, tea was served, and Seina observed the room while drinking it. He was a little bad-mannered, but he was also hesitant to make eye contact with Jovia. Jovia didn't say anything about it either, so he took advantage of it for a while.

(It really feels like I'm in Japan)

The buildings, furnishings and outdoor gardens were surprisingly similar to those in Japan.

《If it's just a coincidence, it would be quite surprising... What do you think, Nayuta?》

《If this store's logo comes from the name of the store, Kikkei, then all I can say is that it looks very similar to the kanji.》

《That's true...》

In addition to the store's name, there was a mark written on the haori coat like a family crest, which looked like the kanji for “Yoshikyo.”

《Astral Link is the most likely possibility.》

《So someone here has read the Astral Sea records?》

This phenomenon could be called memory of a past life.

《Another possibility, although low, is that some of the Masaki people who went into space ended up here... The design could have been passed down via Racepshi.》

《But I don't see this kind of design around town.》

While he was talking with Nayuta, the food was brought out and a truly magnificent array of Japanese cuisine was laid out on the table. Although the ingredients looked a little odd, the tableware was made to match each dish and was clearly different from what he had seen in this town.

“This is better than having each dish served as a course, right? Come on, enjoy.”

Jovia smiled a very elegant smile. If it weren't for that evil smile and her conversation with Barigaru, he would have thought she was a refined beauty. Even for Seina, where there were many people with unconventional beauty around, she had enough beauty to be recognized as a beautiful person.

“Ah, yes... Thank you.”

Seina put his hands together, picked up his chopsticks, and started with the soup.

《Seina.》

《Hmm? What?》

《...No, it's nothing.》

《? 》

While wondering about Nayuta's reaction, Seina was distracted by the familiar taste of the soup he had tasted. This, and also because he was hungry, made him eat more and more food. Even though Seina was used to Kiriko's professional-level cooking, he was surprised that the food was in no way inferior to hers, and was moved by the taste of his hometown after a long time.

Seina and Nayuta had been thinking about many things, but the answer came from Jovia right in front of them.

“Seina, you can see the magical element, can't you?”

“Ggh?!”

Suddenly hearing a voice speaking to him in Japanese, Seina stopped eating and stared in shock at Jovia.

“I see, I see. I didn't think that would be the case, but you said, 'Itadakimasu' (thank you for the meal), and picked up the chopsticks without any hesitation. And you're good at using chopsticks, after seeing what I've seen so far, there's no room for doubt.”

Jovia was smiling with genuine joy. There was no malice there like there was when she was talking to Barigaru.

“But what about the guy with the soy-smeared face, who looks so Japanese? It’s a race we don’t see here, so maybe you’re one of the people who was teleported here?”

“Teleported? ...Um....well, I came here by normal spaceship, but...”

“.....What?”

“How did you get here, Jovia? Or was it a feedback of memories through the astral link?”

“Eh? ... No, I was reincarnated into another world by these guys...”

“.....Huh??”

At this point, they both realized that they were not on the same page.

“Huh? What? What do you mean?”

X X X

“Oh my goodness... I can't believe you're science fiction...”

After Seina explained to Jovia in detail what had happened up to that point, he gulped down the extra drink he had ordered in one go, perhaps to calm himself down.

“...you're being ridiculous.”

The two of them were speaking a foreign language together, which might be misunderstood, so Seina and Jovia changed their conversation from Japanese to the local language.

“Even so, aliens huh... I never thought the conspiracy theories from occult magazines were real... That's good, that's good. I guess that's what's going to happen, ke ke ke.”

Now that she was convinced, Jovia was gleeful and drinking heavily, talking to herself. Seina was afraid of being overwhelmed and didn't say anything, so he just watched Jovia's monologue while drinking his after-dinner tea.

“Well, sorry sorry. I said it was outrageous, but if you think about it, that route is actually the more normal one, kyahahaha!”

“So... Jovia, you said that you were reincarnated into another world... can you explain what that means?”

“Yeah, that's right... but first...”

After saying that, Jovia made a gesture indicating “Do you want a drink?”

“I'm still a minor.”

“Oh, that's right. I forgot... so, to be honest, I died over there and was reincarnated here.”

“Isn't that what you call an astral link?”

“Hmm? Astral Link?”

“Simply put, there is something called the Astral Sea that exists so that it overlaps with the three-dimensional world, and when matter is composed in three dimensions, it forms a field in the same way. It is like a person's soul, and the Astral Sea has the property of recording three-dimensional situations, or in the case of a person, their memories.”

“What if that person dies?”

“The field is released, and all of their memories are returned to the Astral Sea. In this way, the Astral Sea continues to accumulate records... People born after that sometimes link up with the records in the Astral Sea through the astral shapes they form. These are what are called memories of past lives...”

“Oh, oh! I kind of get it, I get it. That's why they call themselves 'individuals.'“

“Individuals, huh? Does that mean they reincarnated Jovia?”

“Yes. One or two, individuals. I met them after I died, so I thought they were Gods, but... They told me they weren’t.”

“.....An individual entity that you encountered after death.....Is that right?”

“Well, well. I'll explain it to you.”

Jovia poured alcohol into a shot glass to cheer herself up and drank it down. She placed the shot glass on the table with a thud.

“Ahem. ...It was a very, very hot summer day.”

She cleared her throat and straightened up as if she was about to begin a lecture.

“I was a general participant at Comiket that summer.”

“Oh... Comiket?”

“You know? You know that, right? It's common knowledge?”

“Yes, I've never participated, but I know about it because I have friends who are into that kind of thing.”

“Hmm... Well, okay. Usually, I go with my friend, but she couldn't make it because of an event at her house. Her family was a famous landowning family, so she had to hide her hobby. Hehehe, well, it would be bad if people found out that a young lady from a prestigious family was buying such explicit erotic books. So she had to prioritize the family event.”

“...So, Jovia-san went alone?”

“Well, that's why I had to go and buy some for my friend too. Well, she paid for my travel and accommodations, so I couldn't say no. People with money are strong.”

“Well, you can't go against your sponsor.”

“Exactly! But I got a commission based on the percentage of the books I bought, so I just had to hang in there. I stuck with it until closing time, and spent the whole thing except for the cost of transportation on super-erotic doujinshi. It was amazing...”

“I don't care about the genre of the book.”

If you mentioned the genre of the book, this type of person would definitely go off on a tangent. It was a sure bet that they would go off the deep end and it would turn into an all-night erotic discussion.

“Hmm? Really?”

“That would change the flow of the story. If you really want to do it, please ask me again next time.”

“Hmm... I understand. And so, having become that woman's slave, I overcame the heat, the crowds, the smelly mixture of perfume and sweat in a fierce battle, and returned home with a large amount of loot... I wonder why books are so heavy.”

In particular, many women are particular about the binding and other aspects, which made the books even heavier.

“In that case, you could have used a delivery service... Oh, it all went to the cost of the books, didn't it?”

“Well, I could buy a few books with the delivery fee, so it was only natural! It also had the advantage that I could read them as soon as I got home. But I was exhausted, and by the time I got back home on the bullet train I was already exhausted. It was also because I hadn't slept much.”

“Well, thank you for your time... but surely you could take a nap during the trip?”

He didn't know which direction the Shinkansen was heading, but it must take at least a few hours. Of course, she had to be careful because there's a risk of missing her stop.

“Well, that's true. But I was interested in the books I bought, and I ended up reading on the Shinkansen... tee hee.”

“No way... you're openly read erotic doujinshi on the Shinkansen...”

Once you stepped outside the Comiket venue, you were in the everyday world. It was a world of common sense. People should be careful about the way they behaved outside the venue. Especially when they were so bold as to buy the super erotic doujinshi that Jovia talked about...

“Come on! There's no way I would pull out that woman's dangerous stuff! I have common sense too!”

“Am I just imagining things when I feel a little suspicious?”

“It's just your imagination! It was relatively light stuff. I covered the cover, and luckily the seat next to me was empty, so unless someone peeked from the seat behind me, they wouldn't know.”

“…..Please continue your story.”

If Jovia was an Airi-type, then it would be futile to ask for more common sense.

“Then, when I tried to change trains at my hometown... well, how can I put it... I was so tired, hot, and hungry that I lost consciousness...”

“Maybe you used up the food portion as well?”

“I drank a lot of water to cover it up♡”

“...And then the next thing you knew, you met this person?”

She probably had mild hypoglycemia.

“Well, yeah... Oh, I thought, ‘Oh no,’ but I was pretty conscious of it. I laughed when I saw my friends' erotic doujinshi scattered around. Well, I thought it was dangerous in a different sense, ahahaha.”

“.....”

If her friend's erotic doujinshi were scattered all over the place, then Jovia must have been in a similar situation. She said this with a laugh, which was just like Airi's. Of course, since it was after dinner, he didn't want to go into the details of the situation.

“But then I guess I reached my limit, and after my consciousness was cut off, I woke up in a completely different space... and that's when I found him.”

It looked like they're finally getting to the core of it.

X X X

“Huh? What what what what? Where am I?”

When she regained consciousness, she found herself in a place with only a sofa in a pure white space. What was strange was something like a decorative window floating a little distance away. There was no frame or structure supporting it, it just felt like a hole in the white space, and beyond it she could see various landscapes. They were the sea, mountains, sky, underwater, all kinds of landscapes on land, and sometimes even the universe.

“Welcome to our unique space. Please take a seat.”

A woman in a white medical uniform was standing there. Her hair was brownish and changed color depending on the light, and her eyes were the same color as her hair. Her skin was like white porcelain. She didn't give off an uneasy feeling, but she clearly had a non-human vibe.

“I am sorry to inform you that you are dead.”

— sat down on the sofa, and the woman sat down diagonally across from her. By that time, — had regained his composure.

“Huh..... I'm sorry to hear that I’m dead. Is it possible that you are a god? Or Buddha? Or perhaps Enma? If so, then you turned in to a woman. (TN: Enma-Daiō (閻魔大王), is the Lord of Hell and the judge of the dead.)

Now that she had calmed down and was back to normal, her delusions were in full swing.

“Yes, yes, calm down.”

“Oh, sorry. It's just a habit.”

“I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I'm none of those. I am ‘Individual’ registration number 23994586878991.” (TN: Individual, 個 , is pronounced ‘ko’)

“Ko? Ko 239925868...um.”

“Ko is an Individual. It means that one maintains their individuality even after losing their body. I said that I am not a God, but from your perspective I have a similar power. Also, numbers don't have any meaning, so you can call me Mentor.”

“Yes... Mentor. Ah, sorry for the late introduction... Huh?”

—realized that she couldn't remember her own name. Although her memories up until her death were clear, her own name was completely forgotten.

“When you died, you were liberated from your individuality. That is why I cannot tell you your name.”

“Seriously?”

“Well, if I had to give you a name... I'd call you a 'suspicious person'.”

“W-w-wait a second! That's really not good... No, everyone used to call me that, though. They used to call me that!”

“I'm sorry, but this is a name that is deeply rooted in your consciousness, which represents your individuality. I know you're unhappy, but it only lasts while you're here.”

“...That's enough, I get it. So if you're not a God or Enma, then why did you call me here?”

“There's something I'd like you to help me with.”

“Help... what exactly? In the first place, can I help a being with God-like powers?”

Well, that was a natural question.

“Distortions are occurring in this universe due to various factors. These include things like time, space, possibility, probability, and destiny.”

“Well... I guess it's a lot of things.”

“If this distortion is not resolved over time, it will grow and cause various problems in reality.”

“Destiny is more inevitable than coincidence, right.”

She said it casually, as if she understood, but she didn't really understand.

“I agree.”

She let it pass.

“And if we ignore this distortion, it will significantly reduce the possibility of establishing Individuals like us in the future. In order to prevent this, we would like to ask for your cooperation.”

“That sounds like a really grand story... but maybe I actually have some hidden supernatural power?”

“If you had that kind of power, you wouldn't have scattered pornographic magazines and then yourself, and that kind of tragedy wouldn't have happened.”

“Ugh... I... I'm not ready yet.”

The suspicious person suddenly screwed up her face and began to cry.

“I'm sorry, I exaggerated. I remember that the suspicious person was still young. You do have some regrets...”

“I haven't even read them all yet...”

“Oh, so that was your regret. Well, I suppose that's to be expected after all the trouble you've gone through. But if that's all, I think it's okay to allow you to read my memory.”

“Memory!?”

The suspicious person looked up and saw a pile of thin books being dropped on her.

“Fuuh, fuuuuuuuuuuuuuu!”

“It's the erotic doujinshi scattered by a suspicious person.”

“Ohhhhh God!”

The suspicious person was overjoyed.

“Yes. However, when I say you can read them, I mean only while you’re here.”

“Eh? How much time do I have?”

Depending on the amount of time she had available, she could choose to read it quickly or thoroughly. Before that, she wondered if it was okay to read a dirty, thin book in front of someone.

“The concept of time can be manipulated in any way, so please feel free to play around with it until you're satisfied.”

“Ohhhhh, God.”

“I’m an Individual.”

This exchange was becoming standard. The suspicious person was indeed suspicious, but the Mentor was also quite suspicious.

“...Ah.”

The suspicious person instinctively reached for the book, but stopped and looked at it.

“So, what is it that you want me to help you with?”

“You can do it after you've read the book, okay?”

“I'm the type of person who likes to get troublesome stuff out of the way first, or rather... nothing good ever comes from being tempted by greed.”

The reason she came here was because she was tempted by greed and pushed herself too hard.

“I have no intention of using that as a negotiation point... but I think it would be best to explain first. We would like you to be reincarnated into a new world and live out your life as a human.”

“Eh! So that means I get cheats, get reincarnated into another world, and defeat the enemy that creates distortions?”

The suspicious person happily pumped her fist in the air.

“There's no need to defeat the enemy that creates cheats and distortions. However, memories can be inherited.”

“Eh? But in another world, isn't it standard for people to have some kind of special ability? And if there are no enemies, then what's the point of reincarnation?”

“The condition for the distortion to be resolved is for the suspicious person to be mentally satisfied. Therefore, it is our role to help the suspicious person be reincarnated into a world and living environment that suits them...”

“But I'm not good at being strong, right?”

The suspicious person was quite persistent.

“For people from a highly developed culture like Ms. Suspicious, it's hard to find a place to reincarnate into. For example, in your country, before the Edo period, you would often be satisfied if the environment was a little better than the one you were living in, but with a wide variety of stories and a wealth of scientific knowledge, it becomes difficult to find the world you want.”

“Well, it's true... it's hard to understand if someone calls it a magical world.”

“There are magical worlds.”

“What?! Seriously?”

“However, cheats are not granted for two reasons. First, people with cheats tend to get bored of the world surprisingly quickly. For example, if you ask someone if they want to keep playing the same game for decades, or even hundreds or thousands of years...”

“Ah, it certainly seems like it would be boring. I don't think I could do it.”

“It's fine if people get bored and quietly settle down to a slow life, but if their dissatisfaction and resentment makes them go on a rampage using cheats, and they themselves become the cause of the distortion, then it's all a complete waste. We've tried a lot of different things... and we've had many failures.”

“So it's been proven in many ways?”

“Yes, there are countless cases. In order to avoid this, we ask the target person in detail about their request, but the trouble is that there are a certain number of people who are concerned about appearances and hide their true feelings.”

“Yeah, I know that! I have friends like that too.”

The suspicious person grabbed a doujinshi and waved it around. There weren't many people who could openly declare their sexual preferences, and sometimes they were not even aware of it.

“Can't you read minds?”

“The mind is a jumble of distracting thoughts. There will inevitably be discrepancies between what you are aware of and what we judge.”

“You have to be aware of your desires, huh? And once you're aware of them, you'll realize they're outrageous desires... well, in some cases someone might hide them.”

“So they go there, show their true colors, and commit acts of lawlessness in the name of their hobbies. When that happens, that world becomes devastated, and sometimes destroyed, and there is a high possibility that it will become unusable for others.”

“That certainly sounds like a nuisance.”

“Even if things go smoothly... if you advance to a higher civilization level by cheating on your domestic affairs, for example, it will become impossible for anyone wanting a similar world to use. No matter how vast the universe is, there are only a limited number of places with good conditions.”

Once the cultural level had advanced, you couldn't cheat without more advanced knowledge. Making money with mayonnaise or Reversi was not a reusable method.

“And then, one day the world we can use will be gone... but what if our wishes can't be granted?”

“The solution to that is not to create a world in this third dimension, but in a lower subdimension, according to the subject's desire. Since it is a simulation world, it is possible for the suspicious person to enter a fictional world that he or she has read about.”

“Wha-what?! Seriously?”

“But in exchange, the ability to eliminate distortions becomes much weaker. In the third dimension, one person can eliminate it, but in this case, dozens, sometimes thousands of people are needed.”

“...It seems things aren't going to go so smoothly.”

“Still, it's better than having a world destroyed, and even though we are troublesome people, we don't want to do anything reckless.”

“Troublesome? Does that mean there are some sort of penalties for those kinds of people?”

“It's not really a punishment... Either way, we need their cooperation, so there are individuals who come up with special hobbies... plans for those people.”

“...I heard something about your hobbies or something?”

The Mentor looked away awkwardly, and the suspicious person stared at her with a stern stare. The Mentor immediately breathed out a sigh as if she had given up.

“...It's a very aggressive method, completely ignoring the person's wishes and forcibly eliminating the distortion.”

“A forced and coercive hobby method...are there really people like the sadistic prison guards of Hell? But it's important for the person's mental satisfaction, right?”

“For some reason, it gives her psychological satisfaction. We don't understand it at all, but she has this special fetish, or rather skill. However, she herself is a truly compassionate person, but her love has become distorted and twisted... I wonder how it is that distortion can be resolved by a group of toads mating...”

The Mentor seemed to have remembered something and sighed tiredly. Perhaps it was because she was tired that she blurted out her true feelings.

“A group of toads mating?”

“Anyway, the word “hell” that the suspicious person mentioned is quite apt. Of course, if that's what you want, I'll ask you to do it.”

“No, I refuse! Of course I won't lie!”

“We would be grateful if you could do that.”

“...But cheating is impossible... That's the best part of being reincarnated in another world.”

The suspicious person also seemed unable to give up and dropped her shoulders in disappointment. It was true that cheats were a necessary condition for a reincarnation story. Without them, nothing could begin.

“Another reason is that it's impossible to grant those people the cheats they desire.”

“Impossible? Even with God-like powers?”

“Well... then let's try something lighter. It's pretty tough, but if you're okay with trying that then maybe...”

“I'll do it! I'll do it! By all means!”

“...I understand. Are you ready?”

“All right! Bring it on...”

X X X

Jovia suddenly went silent in the middle of her explanation, and remained motionless as if she had been paralyzed.

“...Um, Jovia? Jovia?”

Seina was in a panic and leaned over to shake her shoulder.

“...And it turned out something like this.”

“Please don't scare me.”

“Sorry, sorry. But that's exactly how I felt at the time. I couldn't move, breathe, or think. When I think back to that time and imagine what I was like...it was like Mount Fuji was on top of my body.”

“Mount Fuji...”

Certainly, if something like Mount Fuji were to stand on top of your body, you would instantly become nothing.

“It was far more terrifying than getting hit by a train. It was far, far, far more terrifying. I suppose Mount Fuji is a bit of an exaggeration, but it was still pretty horrible. So...”

X X X

“.....Oh no....Oh no....Oh no....Oh no....Oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no.”

The suspicious person collapsed to the floor, like a frog that had been run over by a car on the road, unable to move or even twitch. After a long time, her thoughts finally began to move.

“Oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no.”

And after a while, fluid that should not be released began to gush out of every orifice in her body. It was a scene that completely destroyed her dignity as a woman and as a human being.

“Oh no... oh no...”

The next thing that hit her was an excruciating pain she had never experienced before. Unable to think, speak, or even move, the suspicious person felt only despair.

“.....H....Higya....Ahh, gya, gya....Higyaa ...”

The scream that finally erupted from her mouth gradually grew louder, turning into a shriek, but her body still couldn't move an inch. Even though her scream had reached its limit and was hoarse, the intense pain in her body remained the same.

“.....Ugh!”

The suspicious person went from being like a squashed frog to curling up in pain, like a rubber band being stretched and then retracting in an instant.

“Ugh....Ouch....Ouch! ... Don’t mess with me! You idiot! Kill me! Kill me!”

And then, finally, she began to roll around screaming.

X X X

“Oh man, that pain... I seriously felt like I was going to lose consciousness just thinking about it. The pain of giving birth to my daughter was no big deal to me.”

“I don't know the pain of childbirth because I'm a man, but I've heard that it's so painful it feels like you could break a bamboo stick in your hand.”

“To give you an easy analogy for a guy like you, Seinacchi, it's like hitting your pinky finger on the corner of a dresser. Of course, it hurts a billion times more.”

Although she was laughing, tears and snot were streaming down Jovia's face, which showed how traumatic the memory of that time was.

“...If you have to go to such lengths to get the cheats, it makes sense that they say it's impossible.”

“No, no, I didn't get any cheats.”

Jovia waved her hand nonchalantly.

“Huh?”

X X X

“Hey! What? What? I seriously thought I was going to die, or rather, it would be better if I died! Being hit by a train would be far worse! After going through that, I don't need any more cheats!”

“Unfortunately, I don't have any cheats. I gave it to you for a moment, but I thought it was dangerous, so I took it back right away.”

“W-what are you talking about~~~! It's a joke to think it was a waste of time after going through all that!”

“If you leave the cheats on, it will just self-destruct within a few seconds, just like it did the first time.”

“Huh?”

“Normally, skills are learned through long periods of training, tailored to a person's physique and abilities, and are woven together to optimize the person's knowledge and techniques. You can imagine how much strain it would put on the body and memory if someone were to try to remember something that would take years, or even decades, all at once. What's more, with supernatural powers that are considered cheats, it would completely exceed the body's tolerance, causing the body to break down and wipe out the personality and memories.”

“No... but... if I had god-like powers... I could do something...”

“Not a god, but an individual. I've tried many things up until now, but in order for the cheat to take effect, it's necessary to change the form of the individual itself. However, once that happens, the individual becomes a completely different person, and the distortion cannot be corrected. Therefore, if you desire such an ability, you have to go into a simulation world.”

“I see... but then we'd need the cooperation of many people. It wouldn't work out that way.”

“Yes. If you're going to go that far, it would be more efficient to find someone in the third dimension who can grant your wishes.”

“Eh? So in that case, I'm relieved of my duties?”

“Well, since I've prepared this for you, please think about it while you read the erotic doujinshi.”

The Mentor smiled brightly. Basically, the participation prize was an erotic doujinshi.

X X X

“So, after thinking about it while reading erotic doujinshi, I decided to reincarnate myself here in the third dimension.”

In a short time, he was able to grasp to some extent how to treat people like Jovia. Or rather, because there were so many similar examples around him, he was able to adjust in an instant. Naturally, Seina didn't feel any sense of accomplishment.

“Hahaha, that's it. It's unfortunate that I couldn't get any cheats, but after coming here and starting over as a baby I realized that just having memories from my previous life as an adult is enough of a cheat.”

“Yeah, what is it?”

“When you were a child, what did you think about your future?”

“That’s.....”

In Seina's case, he was in a special situation where he couldn't even think about tomorrow, and didn't know if he would be alive, so it was hard to answer. However, when he thought about Kai and his friends, it was clear that he wasn't thinking too seriously about it.

“Even as a child, you've understood what you need for the future, and you've been able to make the appropriate accumulations to achieve that without any waste, so having the memories of an adult is definitely cheating. Above all, even when you first caught the magic essence cold, you were able to recognize the static as words, which I think is due to the experience and judgement of an adult. At the very least, you're the first person I've met since coming here who can communicate with the magic essence system.”

“If you put it that way, I suppose that's true.”

This does not mean that childhood is a complete waste. It is a period when experiences necessary for emotional growth are needed. However, there is a large element of chance involved, as the people you meet, and your environment have a significant impact.

“It was useful in many ways in the development of magic afterwards. The very idea behind the barriers and defense systems I created came from memories of my previous life.”

“Huh? Did Jovia create that barrier as well?”

“That's right. So when Beard brought you over, I noticed right from the beginning that you were acting suspiciously. But I never imagined that you came from my hometown via space.”

In other words, all of Seina's efforts had been in vain.

“I also noticed the strange barrier and tried to avoid being noticed, but... it seems you were completely aware of it...”

“No no, Seina, your concealment technique was impressive. I was the one who built this system, so I was the one who noticed it. The other guards didn't notice it.”

“I see.....”

“Hehehe...But what a find. Maybe I can get back there with this...”

“Eh? Go home?”

The evil look on Jovia's face sent chills down Seina's spine. It was the same look Airi had when she was clearly thinking something bad.

“If I follow Seina, we can get back via space, right?”

“No, no, no... well, it's impossible for you to go back there, Jovia. It's forbidden by law.”

“What? What law? Where?”

“The laws of the Galactic Federation, which I belong to, prohibit us from bringing people from early civilizations into space. By early civilizations, I mean people from planets that don't have the technology for interstellar travel.”

“But then wouldn't Seina-chan not be able to go into space in the first place?”

“As I explained earlier, even though it was a mistake, I went into space following the proper procedures. Of course, there was talk of returning me to Earth, but when it was discovered that my characteristics were useful in many ways, the Galactic Federation officially allowed me to stay in space as an exception. So, it’s not possible for me to send Jovia into space on my own, at least.”

“Ugh! ...Hey, hey, we're from the same hometown, right? It's a miracle we met on the same planet in this vast universe, right?”

“In Jovia's case, the meaning is somewhat....ugh!”

At that moment, Jovia tightened her grip on Seina's hand, showing her absolute determination not to let him slip away.

“That's just a small margin of error.”

“Whether it's an error or not, since it's prohibited, there's nothing I can do about it.”

“But that's the law of the Galactic Federation, right? I'm sure this is a separate organization, right? If so, then doesn't that law apply here? Also, I don't think this is strictly speaking part of an Early Civilization. In fact, there are quite a few people, like Beard, who were born here but have gone into space.”

“That may be true, but I can't make that decision on my own...”

It hit a sore spot, but he had a strong feeling that taking Jovia with him would be like jumping into a fire with a bomb.

“Then why don't we just become husband and wife? Since I’ll be Seina's family, they could make an exception. That's right, that's a good idea. Gufufufu.”

“Please wait! I'm already married to four people! Don't add any more to that, Kiriko-san...”

“What? Four people? ... Wait, you're a harem guy! That's typical for a guy reincarnated in another world, but that's not allowed in a science fiction story! And besides, you have some nerve to commit adultery when you have someone like me.”

“What do you mean, adultery? I'm not married to Jovia in the first place.”

“Hmph... but my heart is as vast as the universe. It's the final frontier! If there are multiple wives, adding one more won't be a problem!”

“It doesn't make sense and it's a big problem!”

Although he was putting up some resistance, deep down Seina had half given up. Very few things in Seina's life went his way.

“Now that I think about it, Seinacchi is currently in distress, right?”

“Huh? Well, that's true. So we can't go into space in the first place...”

“Hehehe. That's why you need my help, right? The reason Beard introduced you to me was because he thought it would be better for you to have a connection with me if you wanted to go into space, right?”

“Huh? Right, what is it?”

“If I remember correctly, your spaceship broke down and had to make an emergency landing here, right? Whether you need repairs or take an alternate route, you'll need to travel to a continent with a spaceport. In that case, whether officially or as a stowaway, if you use my connections, it'll be safer, more secure, and cheaper than with Beard, right?”

“No, but...”

“No demonstrations, no strikes! Come with me into the unknown world, into the final frontier! To space, to space, to space, to space, GO! GO! GO! GO! GO!”

“...Now that I think of it, Jovia, you have a daughter, right? It's not a good idea to take a minor out. You wouldn't just leave her behind, would you?”

“You can use magic to teleport, right?”

“Magical teleportation? Do you mean spirit thread teleportation?”

“Spirit thread? Ah, I see, I see! That's an expression you can only use because you can see it. Yes, that's a wonderful expression. That's right, that spirit thread, Spirit Thread Teleportation. My child is a reliable person, just like me. She's already independent in pitto hunting, and if we use Spirit Thread Teleportation, it's easy to travel to space from here. It’ll be fine!”

“Uhh....that's true.”

Theoretically, if a point was set up here, it would be possible to teleport from anywhere in the universe.

《Seina, you should ask for her help. It would be safer to be a collaborator than marry her, and in Jovia's case, there's a good chance she'll be approved for special treatment.》

《Really?》

《Wouldn't Airi-san or Washu-mother be happy to have a sample like this?》

《...Well...I see...I guess so.》

The idea of sacrificing Jovia was a fair price to pay if it was the path to his homeland. And since it was Jovia's wish, strangely enough, he didn't feel guilty about it at all.

《I'm sure she'll be fine.》

“..... Um, Jovia, ... If it's in the form of a collaborator in the event of a disaster, we might be able to be to make it in an emergency situation.....”

Seina gave in to Nayuta's whispers.

“Yeah? Yeah..... Well, that's about where we're at. That's how it's going to be for the time being.”

Thus, Jovia and Seina came to an agreement.

“Oh! I know this is a little late for this, but isn’t this what the individual people wanted?”

“If there's a problem, I'll say something. I don't care; I don't care.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, they said they were like a Non-Profit Organization. They wanted to do the same thing their predecessors did for them. It's more like a hobby than an absolute goal. Besides, it's not just me, there are a ridiculous number of people in all universes who are eligible, so I'm just a margin of error.”

“.....Well, if that's the case, let's just keep going.”

In terms of emotional satisfaction, fulfilling Jovia's wishes was in line with the individual's goals.

《We managed to come to an agreement. But...》

《But? Is there something that's bothering you?》

《This is something I'll have to think about in the future, but I need to think about how to explain this to Kiriko.》

The existence of Jovia was likely to have a lasting impact.

《That's true... but, well, that's the point of being a reincarnated person from another world, so I think she'll find it at least half amusing.》

《Haha, that's true. After all, it's fantasy, which is Kiriko's favorite. 》

“Well, I’ll see you later”

Jovia, tipsy and in a good mood, saw him off, and Seina left the room while being led by the hostess.

“Phew.”

Feeling rude, he breathed a big sigh of relief at being freed from Jovia. At that moment, he noticed that the waitress in front of him was trembling slightly, as if she was trying to hold back her laughter, but Seina pretended not to notice as he followed her.

“Oh, it looks like you returned safely, kid. I thought maybe you'd been eaten by that pervert, hahahaha.”

Returning to the entrance, Barigaru, who had arrived earlier, approached Seina, looked him over, and smiled.

“Thanks to Barigaru-san nailing it down, I managed to stay safe.”

“Oh well, gahahaha! Well then, let's go home.”

He was given a souvenir that looked like a wedding gift that the other hostess had brought, and headed out on the same route they had taken before. The sun had already set and the air outside was chilly.

“Sorry, kid. I was reluctant to introduce you to that person, but...”

Perhaps the night breeze had sobered him up a bit, as Barigaru apologized in a serious tone.

“Well, since she knew about me, it can't be helped. I don't want to cause any more trouble to Barigaru-san who helped me.”

“I talked to the lord about it beforehand, so there shouldn't have been any problems... but I never imagined she would be interested.”

“Hahaha...”

From what Jovia had said, it seemed that Barigaru didn't know about Jovia's situation. It was highly likely that the lord didn't know either. In that case, it would be safer not to mention that Jovia and he were from the same hometown.

“Well, it's normal for me to not be able to understand her principles. It must have been a disaster for the kid, but the moment she became interested in you, honestly there was no choice but to give up.”

“I understand that very well. I know people who are similar to her... quite a few...”

“Gahahaha! I see, I see! Then you'll get along well. She's also childhood friends with the female lord here, and because of her job she's well-known all over the place. If you can put up with her annoying personality, she's a very capable person, and I'm sure she'll be of great help to you in the future.”

“Well, I'm used to being manipulated by people like that.”

“Gahahaha! You've had a tough time too, kid. Well, if you're going to get into any trouble due to some pervert, you should either consult me or... that girl's daughter.”

“Then I would appreciate it if you could introduce me to that girl next time.”

“You must have met by now. She said she said hello to you.”

“Huh?”

“She’s Raska.”

“Ah! I think she’s the girl who came to ask for advice about pitto nests... Huh? Is that girl Jovia's daughter? She's a very polite and reliable girl. Really?”

Seina couldn't believe it, and Barigaru nodded in agreement. Well, if you know Jovia, 100 out of 100 people would think the same.

“Gahahaha! I swear to the gods that she is definitely her child. She's been called a miraculous hybrid of her mental toughness and her dad's kindness and seriousness.”

(Now that I think of it, Airi-san also has a serious daughter named Minaho-sama...)

Unless parents completely isolated their children and allowed them to grow up in pure culture, they would be influenced by various people, media, and environments. The children in this town helped each other out in pitto hunting from an early age, and worked alongside adults, so they were mentally mature.

“There are a lot of good people around her... but I feel a bit embarrassed complaining to her about her mother.”

“Gahahaha, that's true. That girl is extremely sensitive to her mother's misdeeds. I don't know where she gets her information, but she usually goes directly to the people who are being troubled... Usually the other person is careful, but she can read their expressions. So much so that people say she can read their minds. Then, if she can skillfully get them to tell her what's going on, she goes to her mother and finishes her off. It's become a regular thing these days. Maybe she'll come to the kid's place too.”

“Does that child... have clairvoyance skills or something?”

“Gahahaha. That girl's information network is not to be underestimated. I'm really looking forward to her future.”

“Oh dear...?”

Seina sighed deeply and looked up at the night sky. Looking at the sky filled with stars; he suddenly became worried about where the pirates he had seen on the way here were attacking.

“Hmm? What's wrong?”

“No, it's nothing.”

Seina shook his head, realizing that there was nothing he could do about it now, and took his eyes off the night sky, starting to walk after Barigaru.

(I have to contact ZINV when I get home)

Chapter Thirteen: The Ryotei ‘Yoshikyo’ That Night

(TN: A Ryotei is a high-end Japanese restaurant.)

The hostess who had guided Seina earlier quietly opened the sliding door and entered the annex where Jovia was. She brought a long tray with a sake bottle and a stacked box on it, likely for additional orders.

“Ma'am, I came to see you off.”

“Yay, thank you for your hard work.”

The waitress placed the food and drinks on the table and then sat down where Seina had been sitting there earlier.

“Whoa! Aren't you being very rude, employee?”

Without paying any attention to Jovia's dissatisfaction, the hostess pulled her hair up, tied it lightly, and took out a pair of glasses from her pocket and put them on.

“Shall I hear the report?”

“Proprietress, is it time to go? Yes, yes, I know.”

Jovia took the sake bottle, poured some sake into a new glass, and presented it to the hostesses, Lady Eleine.

“Unfortunately, I was rejected.”

Jovia looked behind Eleine towards the next room. Unlike before, the sliding door was now wide open and revealed an adjoining room with a futon laid out inside.

“I don't want to hear about it. Besides, he’s a better match for Raska-chan, isn’t he?”

“Oh, I told you, you perverted lord! You're just making statues with that Beard and from the front and back! I want a man too! I'm lonely sleeping alone! This young, ripe body...”

“You are a nuisance to young men. If you want to have so much fun, why don't you go to the Sea of Magic Trees and do it with some goblins?”

“If that's the case, I'll just have oyakodon (TN: a chicken, egg, and rice bowl) with that child...”

“You pest! If you do that, I'll seriously request that the guild exterminate you!”

Raska was an idol of the guild. She was a miracle child who grew up obedient and serious under that mother, and who worked hard. For her sake, and with their daily grudge against Jovia, high-ranking hunters and adventurers who wanted to take a hit would surely flock together. If that happened, there would be heavy casualties, but even Jovia, known as the Demon, would surely be beaten to a pulp.

“.... Okay.”

Jovia then realized that the female lord in front of her was serious and nodded obediently.

“...So? How was it?”

“It's possible that this is a parallel universe, so I can't say for sure... but from what I've confirmed, it appears that he's from the same hometown as me. And from the same era.”

Seina's concern seemed to be in vain.

“So that proves your story isn't completely false after all.”

“Also, he can hear the voice of the magic system.”

“I see... you seem to have made a good find. I wonder if we can pull him over somehow.”

“Hmmmm.”

Hearing this, Jovia pointed at herself happily.

“Even though you're the North Wind in the fable “The North Wind and the Sun” that you once told me.”

“Yes, yes, that's right... Unfortunately, it seems he intends to return to the sky, so it's impossible to lure him in. Anyway, as long as he owes Beard money, he'll stay here, so I guess I'll just have to ingratiate myself with him and use him up.”

“Then we should do something about the pirates. You're going to come along anyway, aren't you?”

“Of course! But what are your findings? Have you had them analyzed?”

The corridor Seina was led though was equipped with various inspection equipment. Of course, the main purpose was to prevent bringing in dangerous items. Also, Eleine, being the lord of the manor, had the skill of appraisal.

“Considering how long it's been since his magical organs were created, his growth rate is greater than yours. He has already reached Water rank. However, what I'm concerned about is the rumor about 'Mabia's Lover'.”

“Yeah, according to Seina, that's a phenomenon they call 'probability bias'. Well, it's the same in the sense that he attracts bad luck. Apparently, he's had some pretty terrible experiences since he was born.”

“So...”

“Did you feel something?”

“Well... My impression is that it’s something that was once broken, but has been solidified and reshaped. I see, if he was possessed by the goddess Mabiya since birth, it's no wonder that he broke.”

“But from what I've heard, he seems like a normal boy. He seems like a serious person.”

“Those who are Mabiya’s Lovers are usually abandoned by their parents... so someone must have taken him in, or there must have been a strong influence close to him. I think he rebuilt himself according to the ideal that that person had in mind.”

“Even if he was destroyed once and rebuilt... he's like Frankenstein's Monster.”

“What's that?”

“It's a fictional story from that world. The one where a mad scientist creates humans by assembling the best parts of corpses he robs from graves.”

“You can't be serious...”

“I won't do that. You can make androids without doing that.”

Although she quickly explained her situation, it was far from convincing due to her usual behavior. However, they had been friends for a long time, so Eleine decided that it would be okay given her personality.

“Well, that's fine. But more importantly, be careful if you go with that guy. There's no doubt that it was a woman who influenced him. He's Mabiya’s Lover so he's a pretty formidable opponent.”

“He said he has four wives... Well, that's still a long way off, but I think the 'Disciples of Mabiya' will take action soon. What does Beard have to say?”

“There has been no talk of that happening. The rumors haven't spread that far yet, so even if they do make a move, it will probably be a while before that happens. In any case, they will take their time to determine the Disciples of Mabiya.”

“Then I'm going to check with my acquaintances. Well, if he is recognized as a messenger of God, then there's a good chance he can be our ally, so that's convenient.”

“On the other hand, if you incur her displeasure, it will be troublesome. You should be especially careful.”

If you’re an enemy of the messenger, you’re an enemy of the apostle.

“Yes, yes.”

X X X

“...Geez. I should have sighed in ecstasy when I was hit with the fury of my youth, so why did I have to sleep with a 30-something lord?”

As night deepened, Jovia drank sake while watching Eleine sleep in the next room. The number of sake bottles had increased to three, and only the last tier of the five-tiered box remained.

“..... Is it about time?”

A magic circle appeared in front of Jovia and a midair monitor started up. After a few ring tones, a stunningly beautiful elven woman appeared on the monitor.

Jovia secretly had a place to exchange information with the people at the Kaou ground base,

“One Banko Airencchi. You're still as infuriatingly beautiful as ever. Have you found a boyfriend?” **(TN: ワンバンコ = Hourglass shaped)**

“There's a goblin with beard stubble who smells of perfume wandering around, and no sane person would even go near him, you drunk. What about you, Joviacchi?”

Both Jovia and Airen used language that was unbecoming of their beauty. Even though they were exchanging information, it was not a formal exchange, it felt more like friends exchanging updates and complaints.

“Hehehe. I've found someone who I think will be a good dad to her.”

If Seina were to see her squirming with her cheeks flushed, and heard the words she said, he would probably run away immediately, even if it meant defaulting on his debt.

“Ugh! Seriously?... Don't mess with me, divorcee. So, do you think it'll work out?”

“Hmm, it will probably take a bit of time, but it's a pretty big one, so I'll proceed carefully.”

“Oh no, no. Now I feel like drinking too.”

Airen leaned on one elbow in dissatisfaction and looked away.

“Is it still morning over there? More importantly, is that Cleft-jawed Goblin you mentioned earlier doing his job properly? He didn't come over here, but there's definitely damage somewhere.”

“.....Sorry. As usual, we just followed after the pirates retreated. It was an advanced reconnaissance so the details are unclear, but it looks like they targeted them in the middle of a festival, so there must have been quite a bit of damage.”

They were probably targeting the harvest festival. If so, they would have taken both money and people, making it an “easy win” situation.

“I see... I really want to punch you. You're holding back well, Airencchi.”

“I've been punching dummies every day to let off some steam! I've already punched the fifth one! ...I know this sounds disgusting, but I have no authority to command, and if I were to cause some kind of scandal and end up staying behind, it would just become even more troublesome.”

“The fact that the only way to get rid of him is to promote him makes me really angry.”

“I'm sure he'll take his cronies with him, so I think things will be a little better.”

“You think his replacement will be any better?”

“Next time I'll hit him right from the start!”

“Ke ke ke! If you do something like that, won't that put your return further away, Miss Princess in a Box?”

The “box” that Jovia referred to did not mean “cherished”, but rather “locked up”. Like putting a raging wild animal in a cage.

“It's better than letting stress build up, and it's about time you got a proper job. Seriously, what's the point of having a base here?”

“Are you ready to spend the rest of your life there? That might be nice... Ah, I wish they'd come over here sometimes. There are a few things I'd like to try.”

“Shooting down two Weak Knights with magic will put them on alert.”

Jovia had previously used traps to capture Weak Knights, but of course they had already been corrupted by mechanical rot and were no longer functioning properly, and had been turned into materials by the Barigaru and his team.

“Normally, if a pirate is underestimated, we lose, If they lose, they'll come back to get revenge, right?”

“Those who are trying to make a little money in this remote area won't get their money's worth if Weak Knights get destroyed so easily. There are other places where they can make money easily, so they won't go near a place with ferocious magic beasts.”

“Tch! Ballless bastards.”

“Yes, but...”

“Hmm? What's wrong?”

“It seems like things are a bit noisy in the center... Maybe things might get a bit noisy over here too, so the grandfather of the main family warned us to stay quiet... Well, there's nothing we can do here though.”

“Hmmmm... Well, that doesn't concern me. I'll just wait for the cracked jaw to go away.”

X X X

After finishing their regular contact, Jovia was deep in thought for a moment.

“It's pretty noisy in the center, hey... is it something to do with Seina...?”

Jovia poured herself some sake, remembering Seina's story, but the sake bottle was about half empty. She glanced towards the entrance to ask for more, but then thought better of it and put the sake bottle down.

“Well, either way, if that's what you're talking about, then let's wait for Airencchi's information... I have to get up early tomorrow, so I'll be off to bed soon.”

After shoveling the remaining food from the bento box into her mouth and washing it down with the remaining sake, Jovia took off her yukata and haori jacket, stripped naked, casually spread out a futon in the closet, and crawled into it.

“Welcome home.”

Seina was welcomed by Nana and entered the house. He sighed in relief at the warmth of the room. It wasn't that cold, but he was nervous after hearing all sorts of surprising stories from Jovia, a spirit-weary type of person, in an unfamiliar high-class restaurant. He was also feeling a sense of relief, having gotten used to this house.

“By the way, what is this souvenir?”

“Well, it's alcohol, snacks, sweets, tea leaves, etc. They'll be fine indoors for about three days, so take your share to your room. If there's anything you don't need, you can give it to Nana.”

“If it's a souvenir from Yoshikyo, the contents will change to suit the customer, so I think it'll be fine.”

Seina turned to look at Nana and gave a small nod.

“Gahahaha. Sorry for making you join in that today. You have training tomorrow so get some rest.”

X X X

Seina went upstairs and immediately checked out the souvenirs.

《There's a lot here. Just as you'd expect from a high-class restaurant.》

It was no wonder Nayuta was in such a good mood when talking to him.

Inside the intricately woven basket was a lacquered tea caddy with eight kinds of tea leaves and a porcelain tea set. Inside the paulownia wood box, which had dividers, there were dozens of small varieties of baked goods, bean snacks, and sugary confections.

“The food was also amazing, but it was amazing how well it turned out...”

The fact that they had a different feel from the food and sweets he saw around town meant that they were Yoshikyo originals, meaning that Jovia has recreated Japanese cuisine.

《There are many ingredients that you won't find in the fields, so they are harvested from the Magic Tree Forest.》

《I didn't realize it when we were lost, but the vegetation was certainly quite diverse. Just looking at this makes it clear that the Magic Trees are a valuable resource.》

《It's only natural that being a hunting adventurer is a major occupation. There's no doubt that these are luxury ingredients, so I'll scan them and collect their data for future reference.》

Once he knew the ingredients, he could search and identify them in the Magic Tree Forest. If he compared it with the ingredients in the market and it wasn’t there, it may be a rare item. If it was something used in a high-end restaurant, it should be worth a fair amount.

《Oh, thank you.》

《Also, since the issue with the surveillance barrier has been resolved, why don't you contact ZINV properly?》

《Oh, that's right!》

Now that Jovia knew, there was no need to worry about hiding anything anymore. He immediately used his Spirit Thread Teleport to move outside the barrier.

“ZINV, can you hear me?”

“Seina! Seina, Seina, Seina!”

It had been a long time since he felt the ticklish sensation of a puppy cuddling him.

“I'm sorry I haven't been able to get in touch with you for a while. Is everything alright?”

“Yes, I’m fine.”

It's going to be a little while before I can see you again, but I'll be able to contact you now, so please be patient.

“I have friends, so I’ll be patient.”

“What? Who's your friend? What's wrong?”

“Hey, she live in the forest. Just like Sajyu.”

《A Dryad, a plant-type monster that lives in the Magic Tree Forest.》

“I see... so that's it. I get it. I'm glad you made a friend.”

“Yup.”

“I'll contact you again then. Let me know if anything happens.”

“Yup!”

Feeling relieved to see that ZINV was still in good condition, Seina transferred to his room and went to sleep for the night.

Chapter Fourteen: First day of Training

《Seina, it’s time.》

《...Ah, good morning.》

Seina woke up instantly when Nayuta called. It was still pitch-black outside, and it was around three in the morning, which was his usual time.

The first thing he did when he woke up was check the amount of his magical energy and the list inside the spiritual thread storage. While Seina was sleeping, Nayuta's support (lol) caused the magical energy organs to overwork and grow, and he was stringing spiritual threads all over the place to gather items, so the number of items stored in the spiritual thread storage was increasing rapidly, so he needed to keep a close eye on it or he'd get into trouble.

In particular, checking the amount of magical energy was dangerous if the crystallization of the magical organs reached its limit, as this would cause the organs to grow further. If he didn’t have a rough grasp of the amount, it could be dangerous. A sudden change in physical condition such as a fever in a survival situation, like the first time he caught a magical cold, could be life-threatening. From what Nayuta said, it seemed he had some control over it, so he had not lost consciousness. However, because of this, he was constantly in a state of Magic Cold, and continued to have a slight fever. However, increasing the amount of magical energy he possessed was essential for the future, so he let Nayuta do as she wanted.

《Thank you as always, Nayuta.》

《Hehe. I've finished scanning the structure of the souvenirs you got last night. Let's check the price and the condition they're being sold in at the morning market.》

《I've only looked inside, but haven't eaten any yet, so I don't know what they taste like, but if I find something I like, it might be worth buying.》

Since it was a souvenir from that high-end restaurant, it was likely to be quite expensive, so it was something to consider with his budget.

《However, some of the ingredients are commonly used, just cooked in different ways. Because they are souvenirs from places like that, they seem to use expensive sweeteners and seasonings, but if you're okay with just unglazed food, it's cheap and easy to cook.》

《Oh, that might be good. Nuts are good for quick meals when you're busy, or as emergency food.》

After changing his clothes, he went downstairs and asked Nana, who was already getting ready for the morning, what he needed, then headed out to stock up and deliver the goods.

Taking in the fresh early morning air, he began to walk while straining his body with magic. It was still dark, but the town was already bustling. Well, most towns related to primary industries tended to start early in the morning.

Before the morning market opened, he headed to the collection and distribution center of the Hunting Adventurer's Guild and accepted the job of delivering pitto meat. This was a delivery service that went to homes that were unable to come in to purchase meat.

Using a moderate amount of running and Spirit Thread Transference, he delivered pitto meat to the city and suburbs, and checked for illegal traps. Both were important sources of income for Seina to repay his debts.

《I'm grateful that I can now share information directly with Jovia. It takes time to get Barigaru to check.》

《I wish the rewards were direct too.》

《Haha. Either way, it's the same because I’m paying off my debt. Especially since the bad traps are often noticed and removed by the people who set them while the authorities are still taking their time.》

Even if he just provided information about a discovery, he would receive some reward, but if he could secure the actual item, he could expect additional rewards during the subsequent investigation. Even if he could not be involved in the police organization of this planet or this city, as a member of the GP, he wanted to cooperate as much as possible to ensure the safety of the city.

《Thanks to Seina's patrols, minor illegal traps have visibly decreased. However, this means a decrease in income.》

《There are still bad guys around, though.》

The most vicious ones were those involving criminal organizations, or those that gathered information on other nobles, sabotaged, or harassed them.

《Power struggles between nobles will never end. Jovia said the same thing.》

《I don't really want to get involved in that though...》

The Galactic Federation had the backing of powerful organizations such as Seto, Airi, and Mikami.

Seina could have easily attracted the pirates and criminals and run away, but here he had no backup. In that sense, it was a stroke of luck that he met Jovia, but her power was limited to the lord's power here.

《I feel bad for Jovia, but it would be best if we quickly pay off our debt and leave this planet.》

After finding some illegal traps and reporting them to Jovia's intelligence department, Seina headed to the morning market, which was now open to the public, to buy the goods Nana had asked him to buy.

After completing his morning routine, he returned to Barigaru's house and helped prepare the ingredients that were requested, and then the morning began.

“Have a safe trip.”

After finishing breakfast, Seina was seen off by Nana and headed to the Hunting Adventurer's Guild. It was a path he was very familiar with, but Seina's steps were lighter than usual.

《You look happy, Seina》

《...Haha, it's just so exciting to think that I can officially become an adventurer. This feeling of excitement reminds me of the first time I went into space.》

《Hehehe, don't get too excited and hurt yourself》

After Nayuta warned him, Seina's usual cautious steps returned. In reality, the difference was slight, and the techniques etched into Seina, who had always been on the brink of death due to probability bias, were solid. Even though he seemed to be in high spirits, he was at a level where he could adequately deal with any trouble. However, there was a world of difference between preventing trouble before it happened and dealing with it after it has occurred.

《Thank you for pointing that out. It's times like these that I really need to be careful.》

《You're welcome.》

Entering the basement from the usual entrance next to the Hunter Adventurer's Guild, the noise was particularly loud. The basement was a city that never slept, so someone was always working. Especially at this time, the pitto hunting children were gathered there, making it even more so.

The training for new hunter adventurers took place in a conference hall close to the great hall, which also served as the children's gathering place.

“Looks like the number of children has increased again.”

He didn't remember all of the children from the pitto hunts, but he noticed that there were an increasing number of young children who were clearly new to the activity and participating for the first time.

《The border between the pitto hunting grounds and the Magic Tree Forest has expanded considerably, so new settlers have been recruited and are moving in.》

The pitto hunting grounds were moved towards the Magic Tree Forest, and the vacant space was turned into fields. Increasing the number of habitable places was how the people of Magic Tree Planet survived.

《Seina probably doesn't know this, but this city has seen a large influx of citizens from other nobles' territories who failed to develop their land.》

《I see, so Jovia is also cheating on domestic affairs.》

《There's no way she wouldn't do that.》

《You're absolutely right.》

As he was about to pass through the passageway adjacent to the Great Hall, he glanced at the children,

“Seina-san!” Raska called out to him and came running over. Her cheerful and refreshing appearance made me feel refreshed.

《Looking at her again, I can see some resemblance to Jovia. My first impression was completely different though.》

《I agree with that.》

The polite Raska and the hedonistic, drunken old man Jovia were like night and day.

“Good morning”

“Oh, good morning.”

She used a very pleasant and polite way of saying good morning, and that alone was enough to cheer him up.

“I heard that you met my mother last night. Did she do anything rude to you?”

However, Raska's smile suddenly changed and she looked at him with an expression of sheer pain.

“Yes, Barigaru-san introduced me to her. She's quite interesting.”

“Please be honest. If you try to protect her, she will take advantage of you. She will get carried away and start to run amok. She is a walking disaster, a one-woman demon

rampaging monster, who comes up with incomprehensible jokes and laughs by herself, and also uses powerful debuff attacks.”

《That's quite a lot to say. Well, that's how it’s going to be, isn’t it?》

“Moreover, my mother has no idea how to read the mood. She doesn't even try. If you feel even the slightest bit uncomfortable, please don't hesitate to let me know. I will take care of it, and if you need anything else, we also have a damage control team.”

《The fact that there's a victims' group makes her seem even more like a certain someone.》

“Thank you for your concern. But there's no need to worry. I have my own reasons. I know quite a few people like Jovia.”

“Oh?... Really? Really? No, um...”

Raska seemed confused, but was trying to figure out what Seina was talking about. Perhaps she couldn't believe that there were other people like her mother.

“So, I hate to say it, but I'm used to dealing with them... Of course, I get pushed around a lot, but I get into trouble all the time, so it's nothing for you to worry about.”

“But that's too much...”

“Of course, if there are any problems, please feel free to consult with me. If I know someone similar to Jovia, then I automatically know someone in a similar position to Raska.”

Seina also smiled wryly as he remembered Mizuho, Ringo, and the others.

“Huh? Ah, yes, I see. So there are people like that.”

Raska also felt a little relieved to hear that there were people in the same situation as her.

“That's right, how do you warn Jovia when she causes trouble?”

“How do I warn her? Well, I make her sit on a chair in a room and explain in detail what she’s doing wrong...”

“Just words?”

“Yes, that's right... but you’re telling me to use violence!!”

Raska looked like she was about to cry. After all, she was a really good girl, and didn’t want to be violent with her mother.

“Oh no, no! Sorry, that was confusing. No, there are magic words that work on Jovia-san.”

“There are such words?”

“Yeah. I'm sure it will work very well.”

Seina smiled and whispered to Raska.

“Well...”

X X X

“Thank you! I'll try that next time.”

Raska's mood seemed to lighten as she returned to the line she was standing in with a bright look on her face. Up ahead, he saw Guska and Chito waving happily in his direction, so Seina waved back in response.

《Even so, it's a very interesting suggestion. It certainly seems like it would work well on Jovia. But I never thought Seina would come up with such a suggestion.》

《Raska is a good girl, with good sense and seriousness. She will inevitably do things in the proper way. But her opponent is someone like Airi.》

《Even so, suggesting that to her in the first place... doesn't really fit with Seina's image.》

《Remember Kai? What Kiriko-san and Tsukiko-san were doing? Considering the power balance between Raska and Jovia-san, they're closer than Airi-san and Mizuho-sama's.》

《I see. If you imagine it from that perspective, it certainly makes sense.》

Seina saw Raska and the others off and headed for their meeting place.

The meeting place was a conference hall with several rooms, but its shape reminded him of a university lecture hall with stepped floors. Seina had never used it, but since it was close to the pitto hunting reference room and storage area, he had peeked in through the open entrance many times. The adjacent small conference room served as the reception room, where a familiar staff member was handling the check-in.

“Okay. Here's your seat number. Make sure you're seated on time.”

“Thank you.”

After being checked in and asked a number of questions by the receptionist, Seina peeked into the conference room. He had arrived at the guild a little early, but after talking with Raska it seemed like the meeting time was just right. The people who had gathered to take the course were generally young in age, but there were also some who seemed older than Seina, so there was quite a mix of ages.

《I feel a little relieved.》

《There were only small children around when we were hunting pittos.》

Pitto hunting was like vocational training before becoming a hunter adventurer. Inexperienced people did not suddenly become hunter adventurers; they always began with pitto hunting. However, in reality, no matter where you grew up, pitto hunting was usually a game that you were familiar with from childhood, and it was like helping with household chores, so it was rare for someone to be inexperienced as they approached adulthood. That is why it was rare for there to be an awkward situation of high school students among elementary school students like Seina. However, when it came to becoming a hunter adventurer, there were many circumstances, such as people having other jobs, and it was not uncommon for there to be a large age difference.

When he entered the room, there were already quite a few people there. Some were sitting, but others had gathered in a small space a little away, talking. They were probably acquaintances, or people who had formed a party.

“Um, where's my seat...?”

As he headed to his reserved seat, he saw someone sitting in it, talking.

“Sorry. That’s my seat.”

“It's not time yet, is it? Just hang around here until then.”

A young man, about the same age as Seina, said this with an annoyed look on his face as he glared at him. Suddenly noticing the gazes of those around him, he looked around and saw several timid-looking people looking his way.

《Probably the same kids who were told the same thing as Seina.》

“I see.”

Seina looked back at the young man.

“In that case, you guys can just move somewhere else. Since the seats are assigned, that's my seat.”

“That's why I told you to wait until the time is up!”

“Hado, it's as he said. We can talk about it later.”

“Then switch seats with me.”

“Since the guild assigned them, it's not up to me.”

“Then hurry up and ask me!”

The young man, who was suddenly called “Hado”, slammed a left hook into Seina's liver without any preparatory movements. It was a splendid surprise attack, and he seemed quite experienced in fighting. However...

Bam!

With a loud thud, Seina easily blocked the punch.

“Damn it!”

“Hado! Go back to your seat. And I have no intention of forming a party with you.”

“Tch! Let go!”

Hado violently shook off Seina's hand and walked past him. However, as if he wanted to release even a little bit of anger, he tried to slam his elbow into Seina's side as they passed each other. However, such a surprise attack didn't work on Seina. He easily blocked it with his elbow.

“Whoa!”

Hado was physically stronger, but Seina had received bio enhancements and couldn’t be budged. As a result, Hado was pushed out, and he stumbled unsteadily into the passageway.

“Damn you!”

His anger made him lose his footing, and as he tried to turn to look at Seina with an angry look on his face, he lost his footing on the stairs.

“Oh, my God! Owww!”

And with that, Hado tumbled straight down the stairs.

This commotion had attracted attention, and laughter broke out throughout the hall. Just as one would have thought that Hado would stop midway, he took a spectacular fall down the stairs, all the way to the bottom where the podium was. Some people couldn't contain themselves and burst out laughing, causing even more uproar in the hall. However, of course, there were a few people who were worried about Hado's fall down the stairs,

“Dammit!”

Hado stood up full of energy and glared at Seina.

《Yes! Trouble like this is what makes an adventurer's guild.》

《More importantly, is your body okay?》

《”I'm fine, I was strengthening my body while I was sick, and I scanned myself but found nothing wrong. I'm in great shape.”》

《...Yes, that's the best thing. In that case, how should we deal with this?》

《Just beat him up. It looks like that's what he was planning to do.》

“Hey! Don't you dare look down on me! Come here!”

As Nayuta had pointed out, he had fallen quite dramatically, but Hado glared at Seina with great energy.

《See?》

《You're getting too carried away, Nayuta... Besides...》

Some in the conference hall were hoping for a battle, but others were not happy with any more commotion. Seina was, of course, in the latter group.

“...It's almost time for training to begin. If you really want to, how about after the training?”

“Shut up! Who are you trying to be? If you want to be an adventurer, don't run away.”

“That's right! Don't run away.”

The one who spoke from behind Hado was Jovia. Before he knew it, Jovia was there with a big smile on her face, clearly trying to egg him on.

“““““.....”””””

Those who knew Jovia were all silent, as if they were expecting a disaster to happen. The same went for those who had been expecting a battle, but about 30% of the people who must have come from outside were still beaming with joy and excitement.

“Hmm? What's wrong? Come on!”

Hado, excited and humiliated, was full of enthusiasm and doesn't seem to care about the mood in the hall. He beckoned to Seina with both hands.

“That's right! Go for it!” Jovia said.

“Hey, are you scared?”

And Jovia, “That's right! Hey, pitcher, are you nervous? Yeah! Hey, hey, hey!”

Jovia got even more excited and started dancing strangely behind Hado. She looked really happy.

“Shut up! You're making me sick! Just stay out of it you old hag!”

Hado yelled in an irritated tone at Jovia, who was heckling from behind and getting quite annoyed.

— He's finished.

At that moment, everyone who knew Jovia froze.

“Ho~ho... All right! Let's have a duel then! Everyone, gather at the Terrace Arena!” As if she had been waiting for this, Jovia shouted with the biggest smile on her face.

“Hey Jovia! We're about to start class now!”

Staff members who noticed the commotion rushed over and tried to stop it, but…

“Shut up! This is also a lesson!”

The staff who tried to stop her immediately decided that it was useless after hearing that shout. They were like, “Yeah, it's impossible!” At this point, there was no stopping her. Sadly, the staff who knew her character well quickly ran off to discuss changes with the others and to call for backup.

“Hey, old hag, why are you deciding this on your own?!”

Hado stepped further towards the edge of the cliff, a dive to his death. His ignorance was invincible.

“Huh? What? I wonder if Hado is scared too?”

“You bastard! You think I’m scared?”

“Ha ha, right? This is your chance to beat up the guy who embarrassed you in front of everyone, isn't it?” Jovia pointed at Seina with a devilish grin.

“Heh! That bastard better run away.”

“Yes! That's it!”

After being persuaded by Jovia, a duel was decided. It was unfortunate for Seina, but fortunate for Hado. Jovia's mood was in favor of Seina against Hado, so he was able to avoid danger, but if the scales had tipped toward the angry side, Hado's fate would have been sealed.

X X X

The students were brought to the Terrace Arena, located almost directly above the large hall where the pitto hunting children had gathered earlier. This was an arena with special spectator seating in the above-ground facilities of the Hunting Adventurers Guild, and unlike the general training arenas and the underground arena for serious battles where betting also occurred, it was a place where Hunting Adventurer rank-up exam trials were held and demonstrations were given to nobles and guild executives. It was by no means a place that could be used for grudge duels... or so it seemed.

“No, no, no, no, this is a class for young people who want to become hunting adventurers, so it's fine, right?”

Jovia was trying to push through her argument with a forceful justification. The staff member she was arguing with this time was not the thin, office-type staff member from earlier, but a retired adventurer who was now working as a rough-and-tumble staff member.

“I guess it's just because this is the closest place.”

He was actually yelling at Jovia without hesitation. Even though he had no intention of stopping the duel.

“Oh my, that's disappointing. I was thinking of their best interests.”

“You're not just holding a grudge for being called an old hag and trying to execute him publicly because it seems funny, are you?”

“Of course it’s okay? Right? And don't worry about Beard.”

Seina owed Barigaru money. If he were to be injured beyond repair, it would be a major problem. Of course, the staff knew about it.

“...I understand. But we'll be the referees. If we let you do it, you'll never admit defeat and will try to keep going until the very end.”

“That's not true.”

“Stop talking like that!”

“Yes, yes... I'll leave it to you! You can stop it at the appropriate point at your discretion.”

“...Yeah, just watch the game quietly.”

Jovia smiled at him, and the staff member quickly turned to Hado to explain the situation. For some reason, however, Jovia ignored what the staff member said and skipped toward Seina.

“Come on, Seina! Don't be shy, just beat him up! Beat him to a pulp!”

No longer intending to hide anything, Jovia gave orders to Seina with her true feelings fully exposed.

《She really does look like some kind of evil female executive. That's quite fitting though.》

“...Jovia-san, isn't this a lesson for the young people?”

“Shut up! People who have no manners and call girls old hags need to be disciplined properly.”

“Then at least hide your personal grudge.”

Seina looked towards the rough-and-tumble staff member who had offered to referee the situation, hoping that he would warn him, but his hopes were dashed as he shook his head in vain, saying it was a waste. Of course, the other staff members were saying the same thing.

“Hey, hurry up! No matter how much advice you give him, it's no use, old hag.”

“What the hell, you little brat! All right! I'm going to disable the bastard myself. I'll personally disable the bastard myself.....”

“Haha! Don't push yourself, you old hag. That's just a cold shower for the elderly.”

There were a few laughs and jeers from the students, but the majority were in a cold sweat at Hado's reckless words. The staff members were also all on their feet, ready to stop Jovia.

“……kill you.”

It was dangerous. The moment the staff were about to rush out,

“There's a phrase here too: 'Cold water for the elderly.'“

“Hmm? Yeah, I used it, and it spread.”

Seina's nonchalant remark immediately subsided Jovia's murderous intent.

Regardless of how angry she may be, it was Jovia's nature to respond to criticism with a joke. The fact that the staff members who were about to rush out stumbled slightly was just part of the comedy routine.

“Ah... I see. Well, I won't ask who it was used on, but the point is, the boomerang came back to you.”

“Who's the old hag?! But....that's a pretty good remark. Well, whatever. Putting the old hag aside, since you made that remark, I'm going to make Seina take responsibility for it!”

“Well, I'm the one doing the duel...”

Seina was the catalyst, but Jovia was the reason it escalated to a duel. Of course, even if he told her that, she wouldn't think anything of it.

“Then I will settle my grudge in your place...”

“It’s a duel!”

“...Advice to Seinacchi who is dueling. Go hard on that bum! Beat him up!”

“Even if you say that out of personal grudge, it's not really advice.”

“No, no! That brat has bad behavior that was caught in a preliminary investigation. Well, there are a lot of hot-headed hunting adventurers, but in his case, he's the type that drags

everyone around him down and destroys himself. He causes trouble even during short waiting times, so there's no doubt about it.”

“So that's what they meant by ‘assigning seats?”

In short, seat selection was a test to see if there would be any problems.

“Hey! How long are you going to make me wait? Or are you seriously scared? If you want to surrender, just give me all of your assets and I'll forgive you. You've saved up a decent amount from hunting pittos, haven't you? Gahahaha! Ah, that's not enough. I'll make you my slave for the rest of your life.”

《Hado-kun seems to have a habit of loudly proclaiming that he is stupid.》

“Yeah... well, he's an idiot like that. It's only compassion to correct him in the first place, you know? I'll follow up afterwards, so just go ahead and do it!”

For some reason, Nayuta and Jovia's words are in sync.

“..... I understand.” Seina replied, trying to hold back his laughter.

However, Seina was also a person who had been exposed to various kinds of malice. He vaguely felt that Hado's nature was just as Jovia feared. Unless there were kind volunteers who could steadily correct him, in the end, one had to realize their own personality and correct it themselves through hard work. So, at this point, there was no choice but to eliminate him so as not to cause trouble to other people.

《So, what should we do?”》

《It is quite difficult to break an opponent's will to fight, isn't it?》

Judging from Hado's appearance, his specialty was striking, in other words, fighting. If he used the techniques Seina knew to neutralize him, he would likely not admit defeat.

《So it's a straight-up fight. Is it a show of strength?”》

《That's a difficult thing to get right.”》

In a fight using bladed or wooden weapons, if it hit the body, it was considered a fatal blow, but with striking attacks, even if you stopped just short of the target, you didn’t know the actual damage. With a type like Hado, he wouldn't be satisfied unless he could knock him down and make him unable to move. But doing that to Hado, who has no physical enhancements, was dangerous. Seina didn't know when he'd exceed his tolerance.

《Maybe a friendship will blossom while we're fighting?》

《That's not promising.》

That was only possible if one had a certain degree of respect for the other person's strength from the beginning.

《Why don't you just shut him down?》

《It just adds to the resentment. I think what Jovia is talking about is an overwhelming difference in power that doesn't even feel like it... but you have to make the other person aware of that, so the hurdle is just too high.》

《Well, it's hard to discipline children.》

While he was thinking about it, it seemed like the preparations for the duel were complete, and the officials who were to act as referees had all taken their positions. The main referee, the rough-and-tumble staff member, explained the rules.

“No weapons are allowed this time. No hidden weapons are allowed. No attacks to the groin or gouging the eyes. That's it. Everything else is okay, but I will stop it if I judge it to be dangerous.”

“Tsk! How refined. Are duels really so lax around here?”

“From our perspective, it's just a pointless fight between kids. If you want to get serious, I won't mind if you do it somewhere within the guild. There's a place in the basement where you can do that, you know?”

The rough-and-tumble staff member easily evaded Hado's provocation. They didn't seem to care about the level of it.

“Hmph!... Well, there's no need for me to get serious against an opponent like this.”

“Okay, Seina's good too.”

“I got it.”

“Now, both of you move three squares away.”

The floor of the arena was made of two-tone wood and was like a giant chessboard. Each square was about two meters square, so they needed to stand about six meters away.

《Disciplining children... That seems like something Kiriko-san would be good at... Ah, I see.》

At that moment, Seina remembered the intimidation used by Seto and others. Recently, Kiriko has also been using it a lot. It would be possible to make Hado realize the difference in their strength. But the problem was...

《The question is, can I really perform such a feat...?》

Seina carefully recalled Seto and Kiriko's behavior up until now, but no matter how he thought about it, it seemed impossible for him to imitate them in the same way.

“—!”

At that moment, Seina felt as if the referee had given him some kind of signal. At that moment, his mind suddenly sank into a certain realm.

This was what they called “entering the zone”, a phenomenon that occurred when Seina, who with his bias in probability, needed to instantly avoid danger by concentrating his mind. Normally, this was not something that could be done easily, but in Seina's case, it was a necessary skill for survival. And since there were countless situations where he needed it, it manifested itself quite naturally.

As always, he kept his vigilance in all directions, directing it towards the area he sensed the most danger, which was Hado.

At that time,

“...Enough.”

Then he heard something, and felt someone hugging him.

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Just a few minutes before the duel was decided.

(Kukukuku. You're such a brat. I hope Seina beats you up.)

Jovia, consumed by a personal grudge, made no attempt to hide it and looked forward to what was to come. Although she had never actually seen Seina in battle, it was clear from his demeanor that Hado was no match for him.

“Kukukuku.”

As for Hado, he glared at Seina with a grin, imagining the screams that would come from Seina due to the violence he was about to inflict, and seemed to be intoxicated by it. He thought that the incident at the conference room was merely a coincidence.

“Huh, he's bragging. This will be easy.”

Seeing Seina standing there in silence, exuding no fighting spirit, Hado was already filled with joy at victory and, above all, at having wiped away his humiliation.

“Both of you, begin!”

However, the moment the referee gave that signal, the atmosphere in the room changed completely.

Something different, abnormal, strange - that was all that could be said to be emanating from Seina. Everyone there, including Hado and the visitors, were overcome with an unidentifiable sense of unease, as if the ground beneath their feet had suddenly vanished and they had been thrown into darkness.

And the moment it was clearly aimed at Hado, Jovia and all the referees were overcome with a shivering sense of something strange.

(Terrible!)

Jovia looked at the referee, who was still standing there, but that was because the referee was a veteran hunting adventurer.

The strangeness that Jovia sensed emanating from Seina was the same as that of a high-ranking magical beast lurking in the depths of the Magic Forest, and the referee's vigilance did not allow him to act carelessly.

“Tch!”

Jovia used the Spirit Thread Teleport to move to Seina's side, and, careful to avoid stimulating him as much as possible, gently wrapped her arms around him and pressed her body against his, as if she were embracing a child.

“That's enough... Stop right there.”

Taking great care not to provoke him, Jovia fought desperately against her fear, suppressing the urge to run away.

“What?”

Thankfully, Seina immediately let out a voice that sounded like he had been caught off guard, and the strange aura that had been dominating the arena dissipated.

“...That was close.”

At that moment, Jovia felt a deep sense of relief and a cold sweat broke out as her body relaxed.

“Jo, Jovia... um, the match is still on...”

“It's over! It's over. Look at Hadocchi.”

Where Jovia was pointing, Seina's gaze was fixed exactly three squares away.

“Huh?”

Hado was still in the same position as when the duel began, kneeling with his back leaning against the ground. A wet stain was spreading from his crotch.

“Hey, judge! Stop acting like a fool and take Hadocchi to the medical room.”

“Oh no! Whoa! Hey, help me.”

“Y-Yes.”

The referees and officials finally started to react to Jovia's voice and ran over to Hado, including Seina of course.

“Seinacchi is fine!”

However, when Seina tried to run over to Hado, Jovia tightened her grip on his hand and rubbed her body closer as if to restrain him even more.

“Um... I understand, so please let me go...”

“Just a little more.”

Jovia blushed and rubbed her body against him. Well, half of it was because Seina's imposing presence had made her so weak that she couldn't stand up without clinging to him, but the other half was just her style.

“Wait a minute! What do you mean, a little more?”

“No, it's fine.”

“Hey, stop that! Don't rub up against me!”

But she was still Jovia. Her restraining techniques were surprisingly advanced, and her powers were enhanced by magic, so Seina could not escape from her. Of course, he could forcefully shake her off with all his might, but that would be pure violence, and it would undoubtedly cause trouble later on.

“I was damaged.”

If she were to say something like that, it would be ruin for him. The staff ignored the two of them as they performed this comedy skit, and continued their work. Even after poor Hado was carried away, the two were left alone for a while. This was because the strangeness of Seina and the abnormality of Jovia had combined to create a truly dangerous zone, and no one was brave enough to try to break into the space.

“...Mabia's lover, huh?” One of the staff members who was watching Seina and Jovia's comedy skit from a distance muttered softly.

Chapter Fifteen: Jovia Sensei's Seminar Resumes

When Seina and the others returned to the conference hall, the students were still in the same mood as before. Seina sat in his assigned seat, but since the instructor hadn't arrived yet, no one tried to come within a certain distance of him.

《”You've completely scared me.》

《”Isn't that a bit strange? It's true that I tried to imitate Seto-sama, but it was just a random thought. No matter how I think about it, I don't think I could replicate Seto-sama's act.》

《The magical system transformed Seina's consciousness into magic and emitted it as intimidation.》

《Huh?》

《What we experienced due to the bias of Seina's probability is not something an ordinary person could endure. This time, you just emitted it, but if you aimed it at someone, it could easily become an instant death spell. In fact, that's what happened to Hado, who was closest to you.》

《...Instant death, seriously?》

《”Next time you use it, I'll control it.”》

Nayuta didn't say it, but Hado's physical strengthening was at a surprisingly high level. Also, perhaps because he was used to fighting, he had a decent resistance to intimidation. If he hadn't, the situation would have been much worse.

“.....Um.” The girl who had been sitting next to Hado, who had been harassed by him, called out. She was also one of the people who had been avoiding Seina, but perhaps the intimidation effect had worn off as she slowly began to approach Seina.

“Sorry for getting you involved. I'm Leren.”

Leren bowed her head apologetically. The others still kept their distance, so perhaps her will was strong, or perhaps her guilt overcame her fear.

“I'm Seina. It's not that I dragged myself into this, I just stuck my nose into it without permission.”

“Seeing as I was in trouble, right?”

“In fact, my seat was blocked as well. More importantly, the outcome of the duel seems to be unclear, so you'd better be careful, Leren. I'm sure the staff will be on the lookout, and will make the person who started the duel take responsibility.”

“I think it'll probably be okay. He's a slave after all.”

Leren, seemingly no longer afraid of Seina, sat down next to him.

“A Slave?”

“As you may have noticed, Hado and I are from the same hometown. He's been causing trouble ever since he was little, and he was seven days into a magic essence cold, so he got carried away and was completely out of control...”

“Oh, seven days...that's precious.”

Since magic colds usually last for two or three days, Hado can be said to be quite strong.

“His physical strengthening was at a high level, and he seemed used to fighting, so I can imagine what it might be. However, from what Jovia said, he seems to be the type who would drag everyone around him down and destroy himself.”

“Yes... that's right. Because of that personality, he didn't like to be taught by someone, and he could hardly use any magic other than physical strengthening. But he has a lot of magical powers, so the stamina of strengthening is amazing...”

With an opponent in an almost infinite berserker state, unless you could subdue them in a short time with a significant difference in skill or numbers, there was no way to do anything. If things went wrong, you could end up needing the army.

“So he put all his magical power into that... well, that's not a bad thing.”

Considering his fighting ability, if he learned how to use weapons and gained experience, he could be a great front-line member of a party. However, if Jovia's impression was correct, he was a party crasher. And he was not the type to last long.

“In the end, he got carried away and entered the Magic Tree Forest with his entourage, which caused a small stampede and caused great damage to the village.”

Normally, if the purpose was hunting, one would carefully dispatch each monster one by one, but in Hado's case, he wanted to show off his skills, so he charged in without thinking and slaughtered weak monsters at random, without doing a proper job of disposing of them, causing the other monsters to go berserk with the scent of their blood.

“I see. So he’s a debt slave for compensation?”

“We're kind of similar in a way.”

“Eh? That's.....”

“Ah, no no, it's not that serious. The village suffered damage, and many villagers lost the foundation of their livelihoods, so the village received a reasonable amount of compensation in exchange for allowing them to relocate to this city as labor.”

Of course, there were benefits for the villagers who lost their jobs. The city was convenient, safe, and there were plenty of jobs.

“Oh, that reminds me, I heard that they were recruiting immigrants to expand the city.”

“But I didn't realize he'd been sold here too...”

“So he invited you to form a party?”

“I can use magic to a certain extent, and you can take on higher-paying requests in a party rather than solo. Plus, higher-paying requests give more contribution points towards freeing slaves.”

“I see. But the problem lies in forcing it on people.”

Whatever anyone may say, he was just trying to turn them into minions that were convenient for him. The root cause was the same as when he and his entourage caused the stampede.

“Even so, it seems like he has a lot of freedom. If you call him a debt slave...”

《If you're in debt, then you're in a similar situation, right?》

《...Well, I see. So he’s just confined to this city, but he still has some freedom of movement.》

“Apparently, they decided that with that power, he could earn more money as a hunting adventurer. Of course, that's only if he doesn't cause any trouble. The staff told me that from now on, he will be restricted in his movements by a restraint ring, and if he does anything again, he will be taken to the military.”

《If you're on probation, you get your license suspended immediately.》

“...I see.”

“Hey hey guys! Have you calmed down a bit?”

At that moment, Jovia came in, looking rather pleased. She looked around at Seina and the people around him and nodded. Before she knew it, the people who had been keeping their distance from Seina were now sitting in their designated seats, and the atmosphere around them seemed quite calm.

“Very well! Now, everyone, let's continue the lesson.”

After making sure that the students' attention was directed towards her, Jovia cleared her throat lightly, put her hands on the desk and leaned forward.

“Everyone! You are truly fortunate. You could even call it a stroke of luck! After all, you are in this safe place and have had this rare experience. First, let's thank Hado, who made this valuable experience possible!”

Jovia spoke loudly, as if she was a dictator giving a speech. She was already in high spirits.

“That Hado-kun gave it his all... haha! He has literally given it all away and is currently holed up in seclusion! Please look forward to his future exploits!”

After that, Jovia couldn't bear it and burst out laughing.

“““...That's disgusting.”””

That was the opinion of everyone there. Even if Hado was a bit of a troublemaker, it was still a pity.

“Hahahaha! Gehahahaha! Kyahahaha~~~~! Ah~~that's weird!”

She must have found it really funny, as she banged the table and laughed through the tears.

Then the referee, the rough-and-tumble staff member, came storming up to Jovia and punched her in the stomach without holding back.

“Guh!”

Jovia collapsed in agony behind the desk and disappeared, while the staff member turned around and returned to his original position.

《That's pretty merciless.》

《That must be the usual thing.》

The other students, having become somewhat accustomed to Jovia as a person, also looked on with blank expressions.

“...Seina-san, I'm starting to feel a bit sorry for Hado.” Leren muttered.

“Of course I won't be forming a party.”

《Women are really strong in situations like this.》

《I look forward to seeing Hado's future success.》

X X X

“Ha ha ha! Anyway, I digress... no, sorry, everyone!”

Jovia stood up and smiled as if nothing had happened. The staff member who had hit Jovia glared at her, but it didn’t seem to bother her. It was like hitting a nail in the face with a nail. By this time, all the students seemed to have fully understood what kind of person Jovia was.

“Ahem... Now then, when I said it was good fortune, I was referring to the feeling you all experienced in the arena.”

Suddenly, a murmur arose among the students and their attention turned to Seina.

“Yes, that feeling. In fact, it's similar to the aura emanating from high-ranking monsters that you encounter in the depths of the Magic Forest. You could call it the intimidating feeling you get when you confront it. In other words, you’re lucky to have had such a rare

experience in this safe place... so be grateful to that insane young man Seina and to Hado for dragging him into a duel.”

《You said I was extremely unreasonable.》

《Even if it's unreasonable, there's a big difference between force majeure and intentional acts, right?》

“Now, as you know, from now on, your main area of activity will be the Sea of Magic Trees. It is a place where many useful resources lie dormant, but at the same time, it is also a den of monsters that are an obstacle to harvesting. Of course, since monsters are also a resource, we need to know about the monsters that are the biggest obstacle. And the goblins are the species you will encounter most often there... How much do you all know about them?”

Jovia turned her attention to the cocky-looking students.

“Goblins are the lowest of the low, aren't they?”

“They're not so different from pittos, are they? I took down one when I was twelve that had entered the village.”

Just as Jovia had expected, the young men who were similar to Hado and boasted of their strength began to voice their opinions. When they declared their intention to subjugate the enemy, a small murmur arose from the others.

“Yes, yes, yes! Thank you, young men, for your exemplary answers! Monsters are ranked from top to bottom as Heavenly, Water, Earth, and Pitto. Each type is divided into ten levels, from level one to level ten, and goblins are actually level one of Heavenly type.”

“You're kidding, right?”

“So, am I awesome?”

The students responded in various ways, mostly surprise and disbelief. Some were knowledgeable but silent. The level of knowledge among the students varied.

“Too bad. I think the goblins that you killed were around level two Earth types.”

“Huh? That's completely different from what you said earlier!”

“That's a nice, nice template reaction! Ah, I'm not making fun of you or anything, you know? A lot of people make the same mistake as you young man and believe that goblins are just small fry among monsters.”

“What do you mean by “mistaken”?”

“A monster's rank is determined by a number of factors. The terrain it lives in, its numbers, the distance to its habitat, the types of other monsters living there, the density, and so on. For example, the difficulty of defeating the same monster will be different in grasslands and

swamps. If it's a flying monster that flies through the sky and makes its nest on a high cliff or in a tree, it can be out of reach even if the monster itself isn't that strong, right?”

“Oh.....”

As Jovia explained, the angry young man began to realize what she meant, as did the others who had questions.

“Goblins really do spawn anywhere! There are even some that live in water, and there have been records of individuals that flatten their bodies and glide two hundred meters from tree to tree! I think that soon we might even find some that can fly in the sky on their own. Their habitats range from the city, like that young man who went on a hunting expedition earlier, to the depths of the Sea of Magic Trees, they spawn anywhere, they're shameless and move only with their lower bodies!”

Jovia spoke as if she had some kind of personal grudge against goblins. Her dislike for them was obvious. They were like cockroaches. The word “goblin” was also somewhat similar to “cockroach. **<TN: In Japanese, goburin and gokiburi.>**

《Even just from seeing Seina when you were lost, it seemed like there was a huge variety not just in traits, but in coat color and texture.》

《It's really surprising how different they are in the wild, where they haven't been bred.》

“There are also many strange, bizarre mutations, and they adapt to all kinds of environments, ranging in strength from scrawny to large and muscular. Their behavior patterns are also diverse, ranging from timid to aggressive, and there are even perverted species that attack females of other species, as well as a species that gets excited just by peeping at mating. There are so many bizarre examples that it's impossible to list them all. Every year, new reports of unbelievable sightings emerge. From stray individuals wandering into urban areas to large-scale stampedes, and even examples of them swarming like ants in deep caves... It's enough to make you wonder if these creatures have been genetically modified by an evil organization or a malevolent deity.”

“But I hear they're not that smart?” Perhaps relaxed by Jovia's humorous tone, a female participant asked.

“Yes! That's a good question. Scholars put the intelligence of goblins at about the level of a three- to five-year-old.”

Jovia's words elicited laughter from the students.

“But! It's dangerous to accept that at face value, and it's wrong.”

Jovia suddenly looked around at the students with a serious expression.

“Think about it carefully. Change your perspective. It's a fact that they live in the Sea of Magic Trees and have multiplied a lot. It's true that they don't have the intelligence to create a culture as diverse as humans, but if they specialize in surviving the harsh struggle for survival that is the Sea of Magic Trees, then you could say they have more wisdom and abilities than humans. In fact, goblins are the ones that have caused the most damage to ordinary people so far. They also cause a surprising amount of damage to hunting adventurers.”

Jovia looked around at the students. Some of them didn't seem to accept it, but no one dared to voice an objection, perhaps because they couldn't think of any logical reason to argue.

“What's more, what makes them so troublesome is that out of all the monsters, they have the most curiosity. Like the story of the young man we just heard about, I don't often hear of monsters coming out of the Sea of Magic Trees on their own, unless there's something like a stampede. They sometimes wander around the border between the Sea of Magic Trees on their own, but I've never heard of one coming out to the pitto Fields. Has anyone seen one?”

No one answered Jovia's question, but many shook their heads.

“That curiosity leads goblins to use weapons, and sometimes even magic. Individuals that are too unusual or dangerous are prioritized for extermination, so you don't hear about them very often. However, when large groups gather in favorable conditions with few other natural predators, there are cases when an individual will become a king, so you can't let your guard down. Some kings have abilities similar to those of the Ancients. You've probably heard of the Ancients, right?”

“Ancient species, right? I hear they have special powers.”

“That's a fairy tale, isn’t it?”

Ancient species often lived in the depths of the Sea of Magic Trees. This was only natural, as gates tended to appear in places with high concentrations of magical energy, but actual sightings were rare and there was little accurate information available.

“They do exist on other planets. There have been cases of goblins being discovered with intelligence on a par with that of humans.”

“Seriously?”

“Seriously. When it comes to the King class that inhabits the Abyss, some individuals have high intelligence and can use advanced magic. When the pack led by such an individual continues to exist and expands stably, the techniques possessed by the King are passed down. When a highly intelligent individual appears, a young King candidate gains advanced abilities at an early stage and becomes independent, forming a new pack, which then grows

larger again, setting off a nightmarish chain reaction. There have been cases where they have taken over a continent. Troubling, isn't it?”

“...What happened in that case?”

“Apparently, the people on the ground couldn't do anything about it, so the people in the sky burned the herd's habitat.”

The Sky People were, of course, those who live in space.

“Sky People?”

“Unlike the people here, there are some decent and serious ones out there. Anyway, getting back to the point, even if we limit ourselves to the goblin species, it's only natural that the difficulty of defeating them varies widely. It's dangerous to make assumptions, even with monsters. There's a saying that goes, 'If you know the monster, and know yourself, you won't be in danger in a hundred battles.' This means that if you know the monster, its environment, and all the other conditions, and are fully prepared and equipped to face them, you can win any battle.”

《I wonder if Jovia brought that phrase with her?》

《”There's a high possibility.》

《”If that's the case, then maybe she's not just spreading weird sayings?》

《”I think 99 percent of the time it's not stupid.》

Incidentally, Nayuta's prediction was correct. Sensible proverbs were common in every world, so if you tried to fill in the gaps, it could end up with something vulgar.

“Through pitto hunting, you have gained experience as a hunter adventurer. From now on, the field and the target of extermination will change. In order to meet your new goal, you must gather information about that target. Here in the guild, we have various records about monsters and the Sea of Magic Trees collected by hunter adventurers. The museum in town also has a greater variety of materials than the guild. And we have many experienced hunter adventurers, both retired and active, working as staff members. We also hold regular training sessions, so make the most of them to gather information.”

To begin with, information cannot be obtained without knowledge. The main method nowadays is the Internet, but even that is impossible to search for unless you have a certain level of knowledge about the information you need. The Internet is a classic example of a broad but shallow search, and you cannot obtain detailed, in-depth information. It certainly has an excellent table of contents, but to go beyond that you need to go to specialist books, consult with experts, or see and hear things for yourself. Either way, you need to know the methods themselves, that is, where to go and how to obtain information.

“On top of that, it's important to accumulate your own experience. Don't just listen, see with your own eyes, observe and try it out. Listen, see, move your body and understand from multiple angles. Combine these elements and knowledge to think for yourself and use your ingenuity to solve problems. Then train your body and mind to be able to put those ideas into practice. Repeat this entire process over and over again. Remember that doing so is the key to protecting your life and achieving your goals.”

After saying that, Jovia observed the students intently. Some were listening sincerely, but many looked somewhat annoyed.

“.....I know I said that at the beginning, but you don't really feel it that much, do you? .....I'm sure some of you are thinking, ‘What is she talking about?’”

《...the place that is filled with old hag.》

《Stop hitting the nail on the head.》

“I understand, I used to think the same way too. It's impossible for inexperienced people like you to really understand it.”

“Tch.”

A few Hado-kun type students reacted to that statement by clicking their tongues. Those who had been told things by adults seemed to feel it annoying. Of course, Jovia was also provoking them to do so.

“Everyone here was bullied in the arena, right? If you're confident that you won't end up like Hado-kun, who got Seinacchi’s attention, how about you go and duel that insane guy now?”

Jovia provoked them, but everyone remained silent. No one wanted to be the target of that abnormality. That was how intense the experience was.

《Oh, dear, you're so convenient to her.》

《Well, it's nothing new, so it's fine. But I'll cooperate if it helps them gain experience in avoiding danger.》

“Kukukuku, I wouldn't have ended up like that. But that's the result of accumulated training and experience. If I was your age, I'd probably have ended up similar to Hado-kun.”

《What do you think?》

《No comment.》

If he did something like that, Jovia would probably demand compensation and demand that he take responsibility and marry her. Either way, she wouldn't give up without a fight.

“You will be receiving various lessons from now on, but just remember this... words are very ambiguous. What the other person is saying will never convey exactly the same meaning.

Teaching is not as omnipotent as you think, and it is not magic that can solve all problems. ...And then, in the end, you end up making excuses like “I can't do it,” “I don't understand,” or “The teaching method was bad”.”

《That's a painful story to hear.》

“But since it's advice from someone who can do it, it's correct for that person. If you can't do it, it's because you're immature and something is missing, or you have the knowledge in your head, but it's not connected to real-life events, so you can't draw out that knowledge. But the person teaching you isn't omnipotent, and they're not gods either. They don't know what you're lacking or where you're lacking.”

《The magic system is a good example. There are quite a few differences between how Seina thinks and the words he uses to imagine things.》

《So Nayuta is making up for it.》

This is why Seina was growing faster than Jovia, who was also able to communicate with the magic system.

“People are born and raised differently, and they all have different knowledge, experiences, sensitivities, physiques, and genders. Even if you form a party, it's not like you can work together right away, right? The same goes for both the teacher and the student. It's something that can only be bridged over time.”

The sense of time when you are young is different from that of adults. Children cannot wait as long as adults can. They tend to seek immediate results and quick and easy solutions, but in reality, such things do not exist. That is why people with high skills are highly valued for their efforts and results.

“But ultimately, you have to realize and understand it yourself. You have to make the effort to fill in the missing parts, connect memories, and give them meaning. If you continue as a hunter-adventurer, for example, when you reach the depths of the Sea of Magic Trees and face a problem, there may be a situation where no one has the knowledge, or there is no one around you to rely on. At that time, when you have to solve the problem on your own, it is necessary to have mastered the method and procedure for solving the problem itself.”

Jovia's tone was more serious than ever.

“Of course it's not easy. Constant effort and determination! You need determination, determination, determination! When results don't seem to come easily, you start to waver and feel like giving up. When you feel jealous and want to give up, you have to encourage yourself and move forward! Life has its ups and downs.”

《Hmm? That's a phrase I've heard somewhere before.》

《Well, that's actually surprisingly true.》

“After the rain, there is a rainbow. Walk your own path! If you don't want to cry when younger and younger people catch up and surpass you in skills and achievements, you have no choice but to walk!”

At this point, questions appeared on the faces of the students. Well, the source of the material was an entertainment program from a planet thousands of light years away, so it was only natural that they wouldn't understand what Jovia was saying.

“...That's how it goes. I know you're all frustrated, but in the end, it comes down to mentality. A weak heart can easily turn high skills into lame shit!”

《Wow... This has turned into a morality argument.》

《Mental control is an essential skill if you want to improve.》

《To put it in Jovia's words, if you give up, the game is over.》

“I've seen so many people with great skills and talent who were weak-hearted and ended up becoming lazy or self-destructing. Don't let that happen to you!”

At that moment, Jovia suddenly raised her hand. A high-pitched sound rang out, and the top of the large, thick stone table that served as the teacher's desk was ripped into pieces.

It was a brilliant cut, and it happened so quickly that even Seina could just barely comprehend what had happened.

“Hmph... Well, if you can't perform a trick like this, you won't be able to reach the depths of the Sea of Magic Trees! Cheer up, young people!”

“Jovia, you have to pay for that.”

The passionate speech ended with cold words from the staff member.

“.....What? But this is a set of guideposts and education for young people, together with the insane one you just mentioned, you know? So, you know, it's an expense. .....

She was a woman with comedy etched in her soul.

Jovia had completely forgotten, but the desktops in this conference room were made of very high-quality materials, and were quite expensive. Of course, various fines for violations were also added on top of that. For Jovia, who had a lot of income but was also wasteful, and was always short of cash, it was a pretty painful amount.

“You suddenly showed up early in the morning, demanded to be allowed to participate without receiving any speaking fee, and then forced yourself to participate, didn't you?”

“Huh? Well, I guess so.”

“So you’re not an officially requested instructor.”

“...Ah! I told you. Yes, I did.”

“If you don't have the money, I'll have the guild pay for it...”

“Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, magistrate! I'll pay! I'll even sell my blood to make the money, so if possible, please keep this a secret... only from my daughter!”

Jovia desperately clung to the staff member. When the guild needed to pay for something, a notification was sent to their home, and it's Raska who would receive it.

“Who's the magistrate? It's you! I don't want to cause her any trouble, so I'll keep this a secret, but you'd better clean up and pay for it.”

“Hehe.”

She suddenly knelt down and stored the pieces of the table in Spirit Thread Storage.

“Well then, everyone, this marks the end of my training! We're going to move on to the practical exam, so please follow that old man's instructions.”

Jovia waved to the dumbfounded students with a serious look on her face and then fled the room.

“...Ah, you guys probably have a lot to say, but... you are still magicians who hold the highest rank of “mage”.”

“““What?!”””

To the students' surprise, the staff member who was called an old man grimaced.

“But as you all have probably noticed, she is also known as a 'talented pervert' and her behavior is as strange as you'd expect. That's true. It's true, but... it's also true that she has solid skills. What she said earlier was something I would have said if I had been the lecturer, so there's no doubt that it's true. Well, you probably can't really feel it now, but as we go forward, you'll understand little by little.”

Even the students who had doubts about Jovia seemed to be taking the words of the physically strong staff member, who was clearly a veteran.

“That's right...I'll give you one more word of advice. The Sea of Magic Trees is a mountain of treasure, but it's also full of dangers. No matter how careful you are, you can get lost. Of course the guild will send out rescue missions, but the reality is that we are rarely able to help. It's not uncommon for the body to not even be found. Whether you are rescued or return on your own, it is the skills you have acquired that will increase your chances of survival. In the end, it is most reliable to protect yourself. That's why you should keep in mind what that pervert said earlier.”

《I wish he had been my teacher.》

Even if Jovia was saying the right thing, it always sounded like a lie. The receiver doesn't take it seriously enough.

《But it was definitely Seina's fault that Jovia forced her way in, right?》

《Haa... I've done bad things to everyone.》

This too was rolled into Seina's bad luck.

“Next is the practical exam, but you will be split into groups of ten and moved around...”

X X X

Seina and his classmates were split into groups based on their seating arrangement and were to take the various tests, with each group moving to a different venue. Unlike the training sessions, the practical tests were to be taken individually with an instructor, so there was no need to waste time waiting.

The place Seina was brought to was a courtyard-like space the size of a gymnasium. Overgrown with trees, it didn't feel like a neat and tidy garden, it was more like a natural forest, with an open-ceiling structure and a walkway running all around it, overlooking the surrounding area.

《Oh, so this is the exam venue.》

There were staff members scattered in several places along the walkway, looking down at the garden.

“This is a test to detect where monsters are hiding. First, you will have to get through here by yourself, but there are dummies emitting weak magical energy hidden in various places in the forest. You will have to avoid them, or if you can't avoid them, move while facing the place where they might be hiding. Well, it’s called a test, but half of it is a training course. We'll give you an answer after all the students have completed the course.”

After receiving the explanation, those waiting for their turn moved to a waiting area. Each person was called by number and went out to the exam hall. It was not very large, so there was only enough room for one person.

“Next.”

Seina was called fifth and headed to the courtyard.

《Aren’t you going to visualize the magical elements?》

《It feels like I'm cheating.》

《Really? Then it would be better if you didn't ask for my assistance.》

《Yes, that’s true.》

Seina proceeded with his experience and intuition. His experience walking through the Magic Tree Forest when he was lost helped him out. Perhaps because he was exposed to the dense air back then, he was now quite sensitive to the presence of monsters.

《...Come to think of it, hunting pittos was good training.》

In pitto hunting, the entrances and exits of the burrow were an important element of the hunt, but it was also important to predict where the monster was hiding in the burrow's tunnels. Depending on the location, you needed to think about holes to set traps and holes to scare them. Seina also used magic visualization at first, but by the end he was able to roughly sense the presence of the monsters.

When he actually walked through the natural forest at the testing site, he found that although there were some densely packed areas, it was fairly open and easy to walk through. He avoided any areas that seemed dangerous, and if he felt like something was lurking, He faced it so that he could respond if it attacked him. Seina's test was over in just five minutes.

“That's pretty quick for the first time. Now go to the back and receive further instructions.”

The staff member waiting at the exit said and sent a signal to the staff member in the passage above. Those staff members would then send signals in turn, which would then be transmitted to the next group of students waiting to take the exam.

X X X

The next place to be held was a physical fitness test. But...

“Yes, yes, Seinacchi, follow me. The rest of you go on in.”

After going up the stairs, Jovia was at the entrance to the next testing site, wearing silver-rimmed glasses, a low-cut shirt, and a white coat; she looked like either a medical doctor or a scientist.

The other students who were with him seemed relieved to be away from Jovia and quickly made their way to the venue as instructed.

《That's a really obvious outfit. It suits her so well that it's hard to tell if she’s serious or joking.》

《I've seen it at the GP in the past. The people over there seemed to be serious, but I guess it’s best to treat Jovia-san as a joke.》

Remembering the doctor who tried to seduce him, Seina was led by Jovia to a small conference room. Jovia closed the door and the sound of the lock clicking could be heard.

“...So, what can I help you with?”

In order to avoid looking unnatural and to give him a chance to escape, he moved to a position where he was facing Jovia with the desk between them.

“Just a quick question. Has Seina been scientifically enhanced in space? If so, isn't it a bad idea to test you with the other children?

《Oh, that's a surprisingly reasonable request.》

《I don't know where the pitfalls are lurking, though.》

Jovia's credibility was zero.

“You know, isn't that a common thing? Guns attached to their arms, beams coming out of their eyes, flames coming out of their mouths, missiles coming out of their stomachs or knees, or maybe their hair turns into needles that fly?”

《It's Jovia after all.》

For some reason, Jovia looked at Seina with an excited look on her face and licked her lips with a thrilled expression.

“I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I haven't had any modifications of that nature. It's just a basic body strengthening treatment called bio enhancement.”

“Oh really? That's boring. I was so excited thinking that with the scientific power of the universe, a whole-body super weapon wouldn't be possible.”

Jovia's mouth twisted into a little bit of a grimace, and she looked extremely dissatisfied.

“What do you think people are?...After all, the GP is a police organization, not an evil organization or anything. And I joined as a regular member, you know?”

“Really? But from what I've heard, weren't you in a special forces unit?”

“It's a decoy unit. It would be different if they were a unit meant to annihilate the enemy, but their role is simply to lure the pirates away so targets can escape.”

In Seina's case, his body had only been bio-enhanced, but the ship he was given was a special edition.

“Is that so? So what exactly does this bio-enhancement involve, and to what extent?”

“The whole body should be trained evenly. It's dangerous if the balance is not right, from the musculoskeletal system to the nervous system and internal organs. In terms of physical fitness tests, I'd say it's about five times the average man's record.”

“That makes sense for space super science.”

“Well, there is the Guardian System... an external support technology similar to a powered suit. The enhancements needed to become the base for that are enough.”

“Guardian System?”

Seina used magic to create a Guardian-like system out of air pressure and covered his right hand, demonstrating the movement of an air arm twice the size of his own arm.

“A mechanical function is created using a force field, that's the simplest explanation. If it’s advanced enough, it could be used to go from a planet to space in a portable capacity.”

In the hands of an unconventional philosopher like Washu, interstellar travel might even be possible.

“I see... but I can do that much with magic too.”

Although it was a ridiculous statement, it was certainly easy to teleport using spirit threads. If you were in a higher satellite orbit, moving between points was also easy.

“It's really amazing, isn't it?”

“But with the amount of magical energy I have right now, I don't think I'll be able to do it. By the way, how long does the Guardian System last for?”

“That really varies. In fact, that's not how it's used.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“The point is... I mean, it's kind of an adventure, like crossing the Pacific Ocean in a yacht. Normally you'd travel by spaceship or a teleportation gate.”

“I kind of get it. The magic I use is partly romantic. But, yes, if your body is already strong enough before you use magic to enhance it, then it's possible to further increase it with magic... if you think about it like that, it's quite useful. By the way, how do you control that enhanced strength?”

She was indeed a capable pervert. She asked a pertinent question.

“I received the usual training to control my strength. Well, at first, I wore a restraint suit and slowly got used to it. I was asked to build various structures using building blocks that break when a certain amount of force is applied.”

“I see... perhaps that intimidation is also a form of bio enhancement?”

“No...There is someone who uses that kind of intimidating technique, so I tried to imitate it, and it seems that the magic worked.”

“I see... but it felt different from normal intimidation. What I felt at that time was more of a negative anxiety than pressure, I think? It wasn't the intimidation of the high-ranking monsters we talked about in the training, so I felt like I knew what Seina was feeling...”

“Anxiety? Certainly at that time, I felt like I was recreating the feelings I have when dealing with a normal crisis... it's hard to explain though.”

“I see. Broken is a good way to put it.”

Remembering what Eleine had said, she nodded slightly, understanding.

“Huh?”

“The deadly fear that Seinacchi always felt? Well, if you think about it, directing that fear directly at the other person, it makes sense that Hado-kun got so scared he fainted, kakakaka!”

“Please stop bringing that kind of topic up.”

“Hmm, if that's the case, does that mean you're always feeling that anxious, Seina? I'm surprised you're still alive.”

“Well... I've gotten used to it, that's all I can say.”

“That's not something you can just get used to. You're insane.”

《I don't want to hear that from Jovia. But, if she were to use intimidation, it would cause a different kind of anxiety, or rather confusion, than what happened with Seina.》

《You can say that.》

“Huh? Hey, what are you thinking?”

She had a really keen sense for when people were talking badly about her. She seemed to have guessed it from Seina's silence.

“I was wondering what would happen if Jovia used Intimidation.”

Well, there was no point in hiding it, so he just pointed it out straight away.

“Uh... well... what are you talking about, panic?”

In response to the sudden counterattack, Jovia nodded her head cutely.

“...What are you talking about? I can't use such an unreasonable technique!”

“You do similar things with magic, don't you?”

“Yes!” She quickly agreed.

“Yes, yes, it's good! It's good! This feeling of being able to make a joke and have someone immediately point it out! I've always wanted a partner who gives me this reaction! That's why I'm getting married...”

“...For now, it seems we've finished talking, so can we go back over there?”

“Yeah, I like that response too: .....Wait! Don't go! More scorn, more shoving! Shove it in!” She said as she circled around the desk to get closer to Seina.

“Stop saying things that could be misunderstood by others!”

Of course, Seina also put some distance between them.

“Let those who want to misunderstand be allowed to do so! My, my, my body has become such that I can't stand it without being pushed around after Seinacchi thrusts into me.”

Jovia shouted as she charged towards Seina. At that moment,

《Seina, use this!》

《Th-this is!》

Then, something touched Seina's hand, and when he saw it, he understood everything.

The next moment he grabbed it; there was a loud bang as the paper fan was swung down on Jovia's head.

“Huh?”

Even Jovia stopped her charge and looked dumbfounded, with her mouth hanging open.

《It seems that preparing for something like this came in handy.》

《I can't help but feel like I've done something that can't be undone.》

“...Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh! I never thought he'd bring out that sacred treasure.”

“Well... I thought something like this might happen.”

“...S-Seina...you're terrible...but...I guess I lost.”

For the time being, Jovia's rampage had stopped. But there was no telling when it might happen again. Seina had stepped into a Jovia-like minefield.

“That's a nasty win/loss. .....”

Needless to say, this became Seina's ultimate weapon against Jovia from then on.

“...But I'm happy.”

“This girl is no good, we have to do something.”

The end.

X X X

To cut straight to the point, Seina passed the physical fitness test with Jovia's authority and was declared a pass. Of course, the staff didn't raise any objections to the decision. After that duel, Seina was already being considered the same type as Jovia, so it was only natural. It is said that if you don't touch the gods, they won't curse you.

Needless to say, there was also the thought that if Jovia paid attention to Seina, the damage to others would be greatly reduced.

“Okay! Now that we have the results for the Magic Forest, we can begin the training.”

The space was small, so staff members would lead the explanation in groups of ten. Of course, Jovia would be leading Seina's group.

“First, let's find out where they are hiding.”

Jovia walked over to where the goblin dolls were already visible.

《They probably left it there because they were explaining about it to the previous group.》

《It's a hassle to put it back every time.》

“I can't believe they were in a place like this...”

The one who spoke, leaving Seina speechless, was the girl sitting next to him, Leren.

The goblin was hiding at the base of a tree, half buried in the soil, in a small amount of shrubbery where you wouldn't expect anything to be hiding. However, the goblin had an abnormally thin body, like a burdock, with extremely thin limbs and a torso.

“All of these guys have actually been sighted. Broadly speaking, there are types that take advantage of their body shape... the most common are those with small bodies that can hide anywhere. It's fine if they just hide, but the worst ones are those that use the thorns of the magic tree to attack.”

Many magic trees had thorny bark, and some secreted sap containing poison or paralyzing toxins that could be used as weapons.

“Or maybe they're in a place that's hard to see because of their fur color.”

Goblins with long black fur were hiding in the shade of the trees created by the strong sunlight. Some of them had spotted camouflage.

“There are those who even disguise themselves. Some of them are quite advanced.”

They smeared mud, dead leaves, green grass, bark, etc. all over their bodies and hid in places that suited them.

“Another scary thing is that sometimes there are blind spots. When you finally make it back to the village from the Magic Tree Forest and try to rest in the shade of a tree in an open area, it's not uncommon to find a goblin right next to you.”

“Does that really happen?”

“Didn't it happen during the pitto hunt? Like suddenly popping out of some small hollow?”

“.....”

Most of the students nodded, as if they had some idea of what Jovia was talking about.

“Most of the time, they hide to protect themselves, but there are many cases of people being attacked head-on and seriously injured. There have also been cases of injured people being attacked while resting. During the training session just now, we talked about exterminating the ones that were in the village, right?”

“It's what you were talking about. Curiosity, right?”

“That's right. Monsters don't leave their territory unless there's an external factor, but that's not the case with goblins. That's why they spread out over such a wide area, but that also increases their points of contact with hunter adventurers. And because they're smart, their behavior patterns become more diverse, so if you don't keep up to date with them constantly, you'll suffer unexpected damage.”

“They are a nuisance, aren't they?”

That's why goblins were the subject of this seminar. On the other hand, their diverse habits also had the advantage of being able to serve as a reference for various monsters.

“That's... Ah, by the way, just for your reference, Seinacchi got a perfect score on the previous test...”

“““What?!”””

The highest score among the students other than Seina was five points. While the average score was one or two, Seina's number was extraordinary. All of them looked at Seina in surprise.

“Well... I guess I just avoided places that gave me a bad feeling.”

“I see, it's a case of intuition based on experience. As expected of the Unconventional Guy. But in Seinacchi's case, he seems to have a lot of combat experience despite his plain face, so this is no use as a reference. It's an example of something you shouldn't do, so ignore him.”

“Then don't say it!”

《If there's an opportunity, she'll throw in a silly remark.》

“The point is, you have no choice but to steadily gain experience.”

Jovia nodded in satisfaction at Leren's words. If she really wanted the students to realize this, she should have found a way to gain their trust, but that would be impossible for Jovia.

“That's important, but there's one way to help with goblin detection. It's not foolproof, but it's a pretty effective method...”

Jovia took out a small bag from the spirit thread storage.

“Yeah?”

For a moment, Seina frowned, but the others didn't react at all. They looked at Jovia, who was frowning just like Seina, curiously.

“This is a mixture of goblin scent glands and other things. If you smell this for too long, it will make you feel uncomfortable. Like a mild allergy? I'll distribute these to everyone except the insane guy who has already had a reaction, so make sure you keep them with you at all times.”

“Eh... this?”

They didn't like being told those were goblin scent glands. This time everyone except Seina frowned.

“It usually develops in about a week. .....You'll start to feel uncomfortable, and then you can throw it away.

“You said it would develop, didn't you? Are you sure you're okay?”

The student who received one picked it up with two fingers as if holding something dirty, and tried to hold it as far away from their body as possible.

“It's like a danger signal, and once your magical organs have memorized it, you'll be able to tell when a goblin is nearby. Well, it's just a little unpleasant, it's not like it will cause any physical harm or anything, so don't worry!”

“Really?”

Jovia's credibility was already zero.

“Seinacchi, you don't have itchy eyes or an itchy nose, right?”

“Yes, it's just that it smells bad..... But it does make you feel pretty bad, doesn't it?”

“I made the effects a little stronger so it's easier to remember. It's not as bad in the Sea of Magic Trees.”

“But it would certainly be easier if it helped them know when there were goblins nearby.”

After a thorough explanation of the dangers of goblins, the students began to show interest.

“However, there are other strong smells, and it can blend in with the water or mud, so it's not guaranteed to be detected, so don't be overconfident. It's only a supplementary item, so you still need to be cautious. Oh, and by the way, if you've had it for over a week and it still doesn't work, apply to the guild and get a new one. I've never heard of a case where it's ineffective for two weeks, so you should be able to remember it that way.”

Jovia took out enough for everyone and started handing them out. Some of the trainees seemed hesitant to take them, but they seemed to have given up, thinking that it couldn't be helped if it meant they could avoid danger.

So, that's it for this morning, so go have lunch. The Guild cafeteria is free for students if they show their number card, but other restaurants will charge you for lunch. Also, there is another exam in the afternoon, so meet at the place where we gathered this morning. Be on time.”

Chapter Sixteen: Seina's Potential

At lunch, the scene was the same as in the morning meeting place, with friendly groups gathered together to eat. The only difference was that, perhaps because the fear of the duel had faded, several young students had taken an interest in Seina and gathered around him. The others kept their distance from him, but still seemed interested, turning their attention towards him.

“How did you get such powers, Seina?”

Leren and the others took their seats next to Seina and asked him a number of direct questions.

“In fact, you could have won a fight with Hado, right?”

“That's right, it feels like they're clearly on a different level than us.”

Under the expectant gazes of the students, Seina began to speak slowly.

“...I've always been involved in a lot of trouble, so I'm quite sensitive to danger. My childhood friend, an old man, was worried about me, so I learned self-defense from him, and then I joined the military for some training, I guess?”

“But that's not enough...”

“For better or worse, I've had the opportunity to meet a lot of strange people like Jovia. I'm not bragging, but I've had a lot of experiences.”

“I see... but then why are we starting here with pitto hunting?”

“I was working in the military as a logistics transport, but I was attacked by an enemy magic unit... I escaped to a ruined area, but I was teleported by a living trap. I was saved by Barigaru-san, and now I'm working to pay off my debts.”

Incidentally, this story was thought up by Barigaru. He and Jovia had already agreed on the matter.

“That's just bad luck... It seems that the rumor about you being Mabiya's Lover isn't all that wrong after all.”

“What's Mabiya's Lover?”

Most of the students nodded, but several, including Leren, tilted their heads in confusion.

“She's an old goddess who isn't talked about much among the general public. She likes to distort fate and play pranks, so she's sort of an evil goddess. In particular, she's said to toy with the fate of people she loves, ruining them and drawing them to the underworld where she resides.”

“So that's why she has feelings for him. But that's just superstition, isn't it?”

“But in reality, there are some people who are just unnaturally unlucky.”

Seina looked away from the student's words and focused on his meal.

“According to an acquaintance, he has a strong dislike for hunting adventurers from a long time ago, especially those involved in illegal activities.”

《Ah, that's the reaction of the people Chito's father hung out with.》

《Well, I suppose so.》

“I hear a lot of sailors believe in it too.”

“What's interesting is that there are people who worship her, too. Well, there have always been people who worship evil gods and devils.”

“But I don't think I'm that unlucky in this job...”

“But they say that people who are enchanted don't live very long, so in Seina's case, maybe she just likes him a little.”

《She really likes you, doesn't she? A lot.》

《Please don't press me like that?》

“Seina, I believe your pitto hunting scores were top class, weren’t they”

“There's a difference between pitto hunting and being a proper hunting adventurer, right?”

Seina was pretty abnormal during the duel, so the students seemed to be out of control.

“Hey you guys, stop right now.”

After being scolded by Leren, the students finally realized what they had been talking about and resumed their meal in silence, perhaps feeling awkward.

“Well, it's true that people have avoided me since I was a child, and I do get myself involved in a lot of things.”

“I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do this... but if rumors like this spread, it will hinder our search for new party members.”

“My original intention was to go solo.”

“But.....”

“It's almost time. If we're late, who knows what the instructor will say to us?”

The power of Jovia was immense. Everyone quickly finished their meal and headed to the meeting room.

“What we are going to do now is to examine your combat skills.”

It wasn’t Jovia but a male staff member who was explaining to the students gathered in the conference hall. Everyone was out of sync, more of a feeling of relief than anything else.

《It's not Jovia, is it?》

《No, I'm sure she’s hiding somewhere. Don't let your guard down.》

《Nayuta has also lost all mercy towards Jovia.》

“The exams are sword, spear, and hand-to-hand combat, as well as magic. As I asked beforehand, those currently receiving instruction from someone should take all of them unless they have been instructed otherwise.”

Here too, in order to improve efficiency, students would be divided into groups and moved around in numerical order.

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Seina’s group headed to the hall where they had their physical fitness test. It was his first time entering the hall, but it felt like a training gym, with various exercise equipment lined up along the walls.

There were also areas that were divided into boxes made of boards and cloth, similar to those used for individual interviews, and inside each box there was equipment for measuring something and doctor-like staff members wearing white coats.

“Waah, wooooooow!”

In front of a box, Jovia was wearing a bondage outfit and a white coat and making a strange pose. The other staff members were blatantly ignoring her. Seina could understand what was going on, but to the others, it was a strange behavior that made no sense.

《Should I use the paper fan?》

《It's an attractive proposal, but if you don't have strict standards, Jovia will probably end up constantly making jokes. Also, if you try to please Jovia in the wrong way, she'll probably just make random jokes.》

《So, just ignore her.》

《...You could say that.》

While Seina, and of course the other students, stared coldly at her, Jovia stubbornly posed.

“Wa-whaaat? Wa-whaaat?”

Moreover, she occasionally cast glances at Seina.

《Doesn't that mean she won't stop until Seina steps in?》

《Tch!》

Seina had no choice but to quickly hit Jovia with the paper fan, then instantly put it away.

“Well, let's get started.” It seemed Jovia was satisfied, because she said that with a big smile on her face.

“““??”””

Needless to say, the students, and the staff, were confused and stunned. They all looked at Seina as if they wanted to ask him something, but he chose to ignore them.

“Well, first we'll measure your magical energy and magical energy circulation. By the way, the measured values will not be published, and there will be no test of magic , so for those of you who want to brag, too bad.”

“Khh.”

Several students who seemed to be proud of their skills responded, but the others just sighed softly.

《Seina, are you disappointed that you can't show your strength?》

《That's certainly a common theme, but it's actually personal information, so it's better to keep it secret. First of all, Nayuta does all sorts of stuff every night, so if we were to announce the numbers here, people would call us ignorant again.》

If you went too far with your lack of common sense, you'd be treated like a monster. It would be fine if someone could go as wild as Jovia, but Seina was a sensible person. At the very least, he would rather maintain his victim status than be called the same kind of person as Jovia.

“Come on, come on, let's get started! Ah, Seinacchi, come over here.”

The staff members looked like they wanted to complain, but they immediately started to guide the students. The students followed their instructions and lined up in front of their respective boxes, but of course, Jovia and Seina's boxes were empty.

《In the end, you're still isolated, just like this morning. I guess she's completely obsessed now...》

《I thought I could enjoy a peaceful life as an adventurer...》

《Seina's standards for what constitutes peace are strange.》

He followed Jovia into the box and the curtain was closed .

“Hey, I'm not going to do anything, so can you put away your fan?”

“No, you were definitely planning on making some kind of joke, weren't you?”

“If it wasn't a joke and I was serious, I'd say .....”

As she said that, Jovia was hit on the head with the paper fan.

“...I'm gonna fuck you seriously...Ah, that hurts!”

And then another. And just to make sure.

“Your daughter came all the way to say hello this morning.”

“Yes. I'll do it seriously.”

But just when it seemed to have worked, Jovia grabbed Seina's hand and hit him with the paper fan.

“Hey! This is a serious test!”

“I'll check with the other staff later.”

“It's true! This is how we measure the amount of magic element and the circulation rate. It's the same logic.

“I'll get really angry if this is a joke.”

“I know.”

Jovia's eyes suddenly became serious. It seemed like it was okay to believe her for now.

“..... Hey, Seina! You've had the magical flu for months, haven't you? How did you get such a ridiculous amount of magic elements? The circulation is so smooth .....”

Suddenly, she stared at him with a fierce expression on her face.

“It's the result of my daily efforts.”

Mostly Nayuta's though.

“..... Oh, screw it. I know it's numerically sound, and I know it's bordering on the insane, but this is a waste of time, so let's move on to the next thing.”

“Are there any other tests?”

There were some unused tools visible there.

“We don’t have any equipment here that can measure your crazy numbers. You’re doing all the magic charge stuff for Beard, right? So it’s all pointless. I don’t want my expensive equipment to get destroyed… or maybe you want to do a “I’m so strong, I can destroy equipment” thing?”

“I’m not that kind of exhibitionist.”

He'd had enough of being a bad guy. He's already doing stand-up comedy routines with Jovia.

“Well, that's better. If there's an abnormal amount of magical elements, it'll just attract a bunch of no-goods.”

“Jovia has been making me stand out in a lot of unnecessary ways.”

“You mean the duel? I guess that couldn't be helped. I only intended to strangle Hado-kun, but I never thought you'd use such insane intimidation.”

“Well, I am also sorry about that, but...”

Seina's momentum was broken by this unexpected truth. Deciding that there was no point in continuing the argument, he stood up.

“...Well then, let's move on to the next topic. Thank you.”

“Oh, and once the exams are over, let’s meet.”

“Uh... okay, I understand.”

“No, I told you to put away the paper fan, I'm serious.”

“I got it.”

Seina quickly put away his paper fan, bowed, and left the box.

《Why did I reflexively equip the paper fan?》

Although he had pretended to be calm, Seina was suddenly holding a paper fan and was secretly surprised.

《I tried turning the Instant Equipment skill into a skill. What do you think?》

《...It seems like it could be useful for armor equipment.》

Apparently, it was Nayuta's inside help(?). As for Seina, he would not like to add a new trick to his banter with Jovia, but since the instantaneous equip had other useful applications, he decided not to ask the question.

“Well then, the next venue is .....”

As he left the box he looked at the directions,

“Hey, hey! What's next? This side is open, so come over here. I'm going to give you a gentle, step-by-step check, but why are you looking away? Don't ignore me!”

Jovia's shout could be heard, but naturally Seina didn't look back and headed off to the next venue, the arena where he had dueled Hado that morning.

Since the arena was fairly large, it was divided into sections where tests with various weapons were being conducted at the same time.

“Okay, next!”

The people he dealt with were retired hunter-adventurers. He had seen them teaching various things to young children in pitto hunting, and also training young hunter adventurers at a training center a short distance away.

“...You're over there.”

When he went to the reception desk, he was pointed in a certain direction. There was only an old man standing in the corner of the arena, and the atmosphere there was clearly different from the rest.

《You’re going to be isolated again.》

《...Ah, this time it's something to do with Barigaru-san.》

It was someone who seemed to be a friend that Barigaru had spoken to before. Though they weren't introduced, the other person seemed to remember Seina.

“Oh, you're that kid from Barigaru's house. Let's get started then.”

The man appeared to be in his seventies, but his legs were strong, and his movements were slow and efficient, similar to Tenchi's grandfather. The moment he thought this, Seina's level of caution increased.

“First off, nothing at all, right?”

“Yes. Thank you very much!”

They faced each other, and the moment Seina bowed and raised his head, the old man was right in front of him. However, Seina sensed it too, and quickly shifted his body to face him.

“Oh.”

The old man, whose first attack was dodged, spoke lightly and launched a follow-up attack. The coordination of their movements was smooth and effortless, no doubt at the level of an expert. But Seina was no match for him.

Originally, what Seina had learned from Tenchi's grandfather was only techniques for self-defense, the basic fighting style of a Juraian Warrior. However, these were skills that had kept Seina alive in countless crises, and were honed and refined through the experience he was forced to accumulate. It was so different that even the Emperor of Jurai grimaced, saying “I couldn't quite imitate it,” and it was a uniquely evolved technique specialized solely for self-defense. It could be called a style in itself, and at the same time, it was a technique that was currently only useful to Seina. Well, for a Juraian Warrior who focused on attack, in a sense it was a useless technique.

“Hey, don't mess with me.” The old man said to himself.

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Although he was an expert hunter and adventurer, Seina had also trained with the Jurai royal family, Seto, Minaho, Funaho, Misaki, and the Emperor, and knew first-hand their extraordinary speed and supreme skill, so he was able to handle him with ease.

“You...”

The old man seemed to have noticed this and began to attack in earnest. He was using Seina to determine the level and limits of his own skill, with Seina being the measuring device.

《But you're amazing. Do you need help?》

《I’m fine.》

Seina had yet to be even grazed by the old man's attacks, dodging them all with good movement and footwork. However, the old man seemed to be skilled in the art of cornering his prey, and the number of dangerous situations has increased.

《If they had formed a party, we would have been defeated.》

It was true that this was only possible when it was one-on-one. The self-defense techniques that Seina has acquired were mostly based on natural phenomena, and were not designed to be used against humans.

《It's about time……》

As he thought that.

“Finished... kid.”

The old man suddenly stopped moving and raised his hands in surrender.

“Yes. Thank you very much...”

It was only then that he noticed that everyone else doing tests had stopped what they were doing and was looking at him with interest. The supervisors and others were staring intently at him.

“I'm the one who should say thank you.”

After saying that, he pointed towards the reception desk.

《I guess I'm supposed to just do the paperwork and leave.》

《Let's take advantage of their kindness》

Otherwise, it seemed like he would be challenged to matches one after another.

Seina bowed again and hurried to the reception desk, where he was told that this was the last day of the exams and, although he didn't want to ask, was told which room Jovia was waiting in.

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“....Ah.”

The old man, Habaru, collapsed on the spot as soon as Seina was out of sight.

“Are you all right, old man?”

“Tch! Don't treat me like an old man...but this is what I look like. Oh man, I don't want to get any older.”

“It's amazing how the old man can move like that. But anyway, Habaru-san, why did you let that kid finish?”

The examiners who rushed over all looked dissatisfied.

“If you all get together and accidentally hurt the kid, what will Barigaru say to you? You know that he owes Barigaru money, right?”

“Hey, hey, we know that much.”

“You're lying! It's obvious that you'll end up getting carried away by the kid, forming an impromptu party, and making a move to hunt him down.”

The people here were all muscle-heads who still loved to fight even though they were retired.

“We... well, we saw what happened to Habaru-san.”

“You think we're going to lose? Are you seriously senile?”

“I'm not saying you'll lose. But even you guys wouldn't be able to finish it solo.”

“Huh?”

“Is it really that bad?”

The man who looked dissatisfied tried to approach him, but the calm man stopped him and asked. The man was the second strongest among them after the old man named Habaru, so the dissatisfied man backed down.

“He is a man of unusual ability when it comes to self-defense. He has an uncommon sense of danger, and he can't be pushed into a corner. So if I let someone like you, who hates to lose and is hot-blooded, take on the task, it would escalate, and he would end up forming a party.”

“Tch, you're the only one having fun and leaving the rest of us to watch? What a sneaky old man.”

“So basically, even if it escalates, it's fine if it's one-on-one.”

“Oh, yeah! That's it!”

“That's not it! Everyone, please judge him on his qualifications as a hunting adventurer, not on whether you, the battle-crazed muscle heads, win or lose.”

The female staff member who had been at the reception desk earlier came over looking annoyed.

“Hmm? Yeah, that's right.”

“I guess that's just how it is, but no! If you don't do it seriously, I won't pay you your teaching fee.”

“No no, Ghana-chan. Even if you say that, that brat is a bit difficult to deal with. It would be good if he could find someone to form a party with soon, but I think it's likely that he'll be solo for a while. If the monsters were aggressive then it wouldn't be a problem, but in reality, most of them run away when they see people, so if you want to corner him...I think the limit would be around mid-level Water-rank.”

The other men nodded in agreement with Habaru's opinion.

“Habaru-san? You see, we're talking about a newbie right now. Who are you talking about, solo defeating a level 5 Water rank?”

“You're talking about that kid from earlier, right?”

“That's why I was talking about a newbie! You muscle-brains, stop looking so puzzled!”

According to Jovia, they were all “idiots.” Of course, Jovia was one of them.

“But, you know, Ghana, if you've seen the fight between the old man and the kid, you'd know that he's not a rookie.”

“That's why I said this is a screening for new recruits! They're going to decide whether they should continue their training or move on to practical training!”

Looking at all those idiots gathered together, Ghana-chan felt like a blood vessel in her head was about to burst.

“Oh, I see. Gahahaha! Well, if you're teaming up with a bunch of newbies, it shouldn't be a problem. It's just that that kid's reception is so amazing, I just had to go with it.”

“Don't forget your original purpose.”

“But it still bothers me a bit. The kid has clearly received some sort of orthodox martial arts training. It's incredibly advanced... but looking at the kid's level of training, I can't see any of the other aspects that he must have been taught. The only possible reason is that the kid isn't someone who can receive orthodox training, but for some reason they felt it was necessary to teach him only self-defense techniques.”

“That is certainly a distortion. But does it relate to that rumor?”

Ghana lowered her voice a little. Maybe it was because she was always yelling at stupid adventurers, but her voice carried quite well. There were still students in the arena, so it was not something she should be talking about loudly.

“I wouldn't have it any other way. I'm working with the kid, and sometimes he hit the floor in the strangest places. This place is made of stone, but the surface is intentionally roughened to prevent slipping. So there is a slight catch in some places, but even with normal sliding feet, I never trip over it. But the kid has a lot of trouble with it.”

The bias in Seina's probability was an everyday phenomenon, but they were unaware of it.

“Yeah, it certainly looked strange when I saw it, but was it really that bad?”

“The kid was already used to it and was recovering like that. And it worked perfectly as a fake. It really pisses me off.”

“The kid was already used to it and was recovering like that. And it worked perfectly as a fake. It really pisses me off.”

“So the whole thing about him being Mabiya's Lover wasn't just a lie.”

“So, as Habaru-san said, the reason he was given the advanced self-defense techniques was to cover up his bad luck?”

Ghana, who was supposed to have come to scold them, also seemed to have become interested and started talking with them.

“When you think about it like that, it makes sense. If Mabiya has had feelings for you since you were a kid, then it makes sense that you have such skill at his age, and his strange intimidation.”

“It's amazing that he keeps dodging Mabiya's advances.”

“But grandpa, what do you mean about staying safe at that age?”

“I don't know either. Let's wait and see for a while.”

“Maviya's Lover, well, Jovia is currently obsessed with him, so it's certainly bad luck.”

“”””.....”””””

One word from Ghana caused everyone there to grimace.

“...What's wrong?”

Ghana had unknowingly hit the spot where people laugh.

“Buwahahahahahaha!”

Although they had been trying to hold it in, the muscle-brained guys finally couldn't hold it any longer and burst out laughing. Everyone was holding their stomachs, and some were even having convulsions.

“Well, I thought so... that Jovia is a kind of evil god after all.”

“The evil god of comedy and perversion... hehehe.”

“Haha... This kid has it tough. Not only Mabiya, but even Jovia is acting strangely and getting involved.”

“That's really scary... I feel sorry for the kid, ah!”

At that moment, the bodies of the laughing muscle-brains were paralyzed for a moment and unable to move. At the same time, a heavy-looking metal basin came down from above, making a clanging noise as it hit the heads of everyone who was laughing like idiots. Of course, Ghana was excluded.

This is a classic Jovia punishment technique. Ghana knew it, so she wasn’t surprised.

“...Well, it's because you've been acting like idiots and being lazy all this time. It's a divine punishment.”

Ghana turned away from the muscle-brained men who were holding their heads and enduring the pain, and returned to the reception desk. She was somewhat in sympathy with the situation, but for the time being she was exempt from Jovia's punishment, so it was no problem.

“There are still students who haven't taken the exam yet, so please hurry up and get back to work.”

“Tch, those muscle-brained old fools! Who the hell are the evil gods?”

Jovia was lamenting this, sitting on a table in the small conference room where they were supposed to be meeting, completely naked and covered only by a sheet.

“.....rude.....”

And then the door opened...

Bam!

Needless to say, when Seina tried to enter the room, she quickly closed the door.

“Hey! I said we had something to talk about!”

“I'm leaving now.”

Seina's voice could be heard through the door, followed by footsteps as he walked away.

“I'm serious about what I said!”

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“It's just a little joke. A joke, a joke, an 18+ adult joke.”

After that, they moved to the rooftop of the guild. As expected, when she chased after him, naked and clad in only a sheet, and shouting loudly, Seina was worried about what others thought and had no choice but to give up. Well, since it was Jovia, it was highly unlikely that he would be falsely accused, but it was the result of his consideration and pity for her daughter.

It had a good view, but no one could come there; in fact it wasn't even a place for people to enter or exit; it was just a rooftop area, and the only way to get there was by teleporting using spirit threads or flying.

“You can save that kind of joke for the goblins.”

“Hahaha! I'm telling you, Seinacchi. But wouldn't it be nice to have a clean, refreshing experience without any aftertaste?”

“Hahaha! I'm already being stalked.”

“Hahaha! Fine then, have a melon.”

“So, I'm already married. If you don't have anything to say, I'm going home, okay?”

Seina took out his paper fan and got it ready to use at any time.

“I'm not a fool.”

“So?”

He slapped the paper fan into his hand. It was a warning that he would hit her if she made a stupid mistake again.

“So....Seinacchi, what do you have in there? Is it space science?”

“!?”

Even Seina was taken by surprise and was speechless.

《As expected of a capable pervert. I guess she noticed after all.》

《Is that so?》

“That's not a joke. It's probably something that happened when you were touched during the inspection.”

《You don't have to show your abilities there...》

She was a really unpleasant opponent. After Nayuta said that Seina quickly gave up. Either way, if it was Jovia, there was no reason to keep it a secret.

“...When I went into space, I was given a small AI probe to help me with my daily life, but now I have an installed type inside my body that makes it easier to function.”

“Is that really all? Your reaction is a bit different, like you're a high-level spirit.”

“Spirit, huh... I think that's a possibility, but occasionally an astral can appear in an AI. Nayuta is that type. By the way, when that happens, human rights come into play, at least in the Galactic Federation.”

“I see, so it's what they call an artificial intelligence spirit... By the way, does Nayuta-chan have a gender?”

“I'm a woman, but please stop making weird erotic comments.”

“No, but seriously, is that okay?”

“Unlike Jovia-san, Nayuta is considerate of such things.”

“Eh~~, is that true? Hey, can I talk to Nayuta-chan?”

It was already intriguing, and of course, erotic developments were a given with Jovia.

“Jovia-san would have a huge negative impact on Nayuta's emotional education, so even if you could talk, I would decline.”

“Emotional education? Does that mean Nayuta-chan is still a child?”

“...It's only just started, so I guess that's how it feels emotionally.”

“Maybe it's because emotions weren't supposed to develop? If you think about it, it makes sense. It would be troublesome if an assistant AI had emotions. Especially of the opposite sex.”

Jovia's face was beaming with joy, and even Seina felt like punching her.

“I hate people who are quick-witted.”

“Hey, what were you trying to put in between that? You're a man, tell me straight out.”

“There are some things I can't say because I'm a man, so please be understanding.”

“Yeah, we seem like we'd make a great pair.”

“That's disgusting...”

For the unlucky Seina, this was in some ways a normal occurrence, but when it came to Jovia, he couldn't help but lament his own bad luck.

“If that's the case, it's even more important to expose her to a variety of people. Even though I may look like this, I'm also a mother with a daughter...”

“What's the point of making so many people bow their heads?”

“A bad example?”

Jovia didn't give up.

“I know plenty of people like that, so I don't need them.”

“Then it wouldn't hurt to have one more person. Mmhmm.”

《Hehe, she really never gets discouraged.》

《What an insensitive person... Seriously, it feels like I'm talking to Airi. I can't take it anymore.》

《You'd better give up. No matter how you look at it, I don't think it's possible to exorcise her.》

《Please don't ever end up like that, Nayuta. I beg of you.》

“Hmm? Perhaps you should discuss it with Nayuta-chan?”

Jovia pointed out to Seina, who was quiet for a moment. She really had a keen intuition for that sort of thing. Seina confirmed it with a small sigh.

“Actually, while we're here I'd like to make a small suggestion to Nayuta-chan.”

“Is it a proposal? ...I will listen and then make a decision. Just to be sure, as I mentioned before, the treatment of early civilization people includes providing them with technology, right?”

“Haha, I understand that. The suggestion is only about magical techniques, so it's okay, right?”

“Well... I guess that's the case. So what's your proposal?”

Just in case, he prepared his paper fan.

“The point is, what about giving Nayuta a body?”

《Huh?》

Nayuta reacted strongly to Jovia's words.

“..... Physical body? That's magic, isn't it?”

“Of course. I'm sure you were also trying out different things in secret, Seinacchi. Ah, maybe Nayuta-chan was also doing different things on her own while you were sleeping?”

“What?”

She really had good intuition.

“I see. Otherwise, there would be no way you could have gained such an absurd amount of magical energy in such a short time.”

“Well... I won't deny it.”

“Why don't you ask Nayuta-chan? Don't you want a body that can move freely?”

《Nayuta... Is that so?》

《...Yeah. There are a lot of things I'd like to try together with Seina.》

《It's true, it's difficult to keep it in my mind forever.》

《Of course, the support for Seina will continue as before. I was born for that purpose... but...》

《I was thinking of asking Washu-san to do that. I think it will definitely be a decent product.》

《For future reference, I would like to know how much knowledge the magical energy system has accumulated.》

《...That's true. I'm a little worried though.》

《I think we can trust the barrier here and Jovia in that area.》

《That makes you even more like Airi-san...》

Amazed, Seina gave Jovia an approving look.

“Okay, I've made a lot of prototypes myself. The latest one is No. 28, which is a pretty good number, right? Seventeen is good too.”

“I'm telling you, please stop with the giant beautiful girl robots.”

“How about something like a black panther? It's very useful.”

“Oh, over there... but...”

《Like Fuku-chan and the other cabbit girls. It's interesting, isn't it? 》

It was certainly easy to do with transforming animals, as there were many examples close at hand.

“Then a kitten would be nice. Something like this...”

Seina drew a three-dimensional image of Fuku. To prevent Jovia from taking the initiative and making it into something suspicious, he came up with a concrete plan to keep her in check.

“Oh, isn't that cute? Mmhmm, maybe something like this would be good for a start.”

Fortunately, Jovia seemed to be on board. Seina was relieved.

“But how much of a living being can you create with magic?”

“Well, let's discuss that at my lab. It's about time to announce the test results.”

“Hmm? That's pretty quick, isn't it?”

Talking to Jovia had been so stressful that it felt like a lot of time had passed, but when he checked the time, it had only been an hour.

“It's a selection process for apprenticeships, so I don't look at it that closely. It's a rough selection process, so it's enough if they reach a certain level.”

The results were announced in the great hall where the pitto hunting children gathered.

Numbered tags were hung on four large boards, and everyone was searching for their own number. At this stage, no one knew what the number meant, but many of the people seemed to understand that they were being separated, and their reactions were a mixture of joy and sorrow.

“Your attention, please!”

The staff member who was supervising Jovia's training session stood on the platform and began to speak. He was probably the person in charge of the test.

“You have all checked your numbers, right? Now, please move to the designated area indicated on the board posted on the wall. There, you will receive a detailed explanation of what will happen, and you can ask any questions you may have. Just to be clear, this is only an evaluation at this stage. This does not mean that your future has been decided. Remember, you can change your situation as much as you want depending on your future efforts.”

Everyone nodded slightly at the words of the staff member.

“Okay then. Let's start moving.”

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“Seina-san. It looks like we passed.”

As soon as they started moving, Leren, in high spirits, approached him.

“Hmm? Ah, Leren... but I guess we won't know until we go there.”

“There's no way Seina-san would fail.”

The people who had accompanied Leren nodded as well. Although it was embarrassing to be judged by others, Leren was right, the people who had approached Seina had a certain air about them.

“That's right. I was trained by my father, a hunting adventurer, so I understand, but it wouldn't be strange for Seina to join a veteran party right away.”

“Even the match against Habaru-san was no ordinary one.”

“It's like, why are you even in a place like this in the first place?”

Either way, those who followed Seina were convinced.

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The place where Seina and the others gathered was a medium-sized meeting hall on the ground floor of the guild building.

The interior also had a slightly luxurious feel to it, and the way they were treated made it clear that the people who had gathered there were indeed successful candidates.

“As you probably already guessed, the only people who passed this time are those here. Well, there are a few exceptions, but generally, it’s about the same number as usual.”

“““”.....”””””

From this point on they become students, or rather trainees.

The trainees all looked at Seina as if they had agreed to it. The staff member continued, smiling wryly at the sight of them.

“Now, I said you passed, but that only means you are qualified to participate in the next practical training. You will all take various paths to become a hunting adventurer, some will join a large party or clan and start as an apprentice, some will form a party with friends and start as a new adventurer, and some will go solo while searching for a place to join. No matter which path you choose, if the guild does not recognize your minimum abilities, you will not be allowed to go any further. You may have already heard of those who are receiving training as apprentice candidates elsewhere, but in the past when there was no training system, the death rate of apprentices was quite high. Most of the time, this was caused by poor working conditions, unscrupulous parties that used them as disposable items, but even in good places, the numbers were much higher than they are now.”

Fish can lay hundreds, or even hundreds of millions, of eggs, but only a few of them reach adulthood. Humans simply cannot have that many children.

“Hunting adventurers are essential to developing the Sea of Magic Trees, maintaining it so it doesn't spread, and supplying it with many resources and food. Accidents are inevitable, but that doesn't mean we can't have a limited number of people, so disposable people are out of the question. That's why this training system was created, and it's actually functioning effectively, with the death rate of apprentices dropping dramatically. The abundance of data and materials has also had a major impact, and as a result, the living area of Nashval expands every year, and new resources are discovered every year in the Sea of Magic Trees,

making people's lives more prosperous. So keep in mind that studying hard here is for your own future.”

Those who had been given a passing grade were more serious than the other people who were there this morning. This was also the result of the training system, including the pitto hunts, functioning properly.

“Now, regarding the training content from now on, each of you will form a temporary party with a leader as your mentor and carry out several missions.”

“Is that in the Sea of Magic Trees?”

One person asked a question. The staff member anticipated this and left ample space between explanations to allow the students to ask questions.

“That's right. But even though it's the Sea of Magic Trees, there are explored and unexplored areas. There are many things in the Magic Trees that can be used as materials. However, if we continued to collect them as they grew naturally, there would be an overwhelming shortage. That's why there are managed areas like fields where they are specially cultivated and increased.”

“In the Sea of Magic Trees?”

“Ah, of course, the things we're gathering are Magic Trees. If we planted them on normal land, they would erode it in no time. That's why we make fields in the shallow areas of the Magic Sea of Trees. For the safety of the workers who work there, we regularly thin out the monsters and provide escorts during work. Unlike the pitto fields, it's in the Sea of Magic Trees, so I can't say there's no danger, but there are small forts in various places, so it's safer than unexplored territories.”

“Can we stay overnight at the fort?”

“Since this is training, you will also have the opportunity to experience camping. Now, regarding the outline of the upcoming mission, first you will be split into parties and then your party leaders will explain it to you. Then you will move on to verify the specifics of the mission. You will have to purchase the equipment necessary for the mission, but unless it is something very special, you should be able to find everything you need in the underground shopping arcade.”

“Um... what about the party budget?”

Besides each person's own equipment, shared items were paid for from the party's savings, but in the case of a temporary party, there was no budget for that. Naturally, everyone in the party had to contribute, but unlike the hunting adventurers who joined of their own volition, the trainees were forced to participate. Not everyone had the budget for that.

“During your training, you will be given a fixed amount based on the content of your mission. Managing your finances within that amount will be part of your training. While I'm at it, I'll explain about the money. Even during training, you will be paid for your missions. However, unlike regular missions, your basic remuneration will be equivalent to your living expenses, which will be paid from the preparation period. And for all of you who have passed the exam and are here now, your preparation period begins today.”

In other words, the test itself was part of the mission and involved money.

“Oh really?”

“Oh, and as for accommodations while you're preparing for your mission, you'll basically be using the underground lodgings. However, each of you will have your own circumstances, so in that case you should discuss it with your leader and make your decision. Also, there will be no charge for food if you use the guild's designated dining hall during the period. However, alcohol and other luxury items will be at your own expense, so don't get that wrong.”

《That's pretty comprehensive.》

《It's like a GP Academy.》

“Also, the materials from monsters defeated during missions will be treated as non-mission rewards, and will be converted into cash and distributed within the party after the mission is completed. However, do not be greedy and try to defeat more than you can, but follow the leader's judgment. Also, you need to be careful with the materials from the magic trees. There are always idiots who collect them without being able to tell the difference between them and crops from the fields, so be especially careful. Even if you are in training, you will be penalized.”

“I'm glad Hado isn't here. He would definitely do that.”

Leren said with a sigh, and everyone who knew about the commotion nodded slightly.

“Well, that's about it regarding the money, but in general terms, we will be training in basic party combat in parallel with the preparations. It will be an impromptu party, but considering the level of the mission, the people here should be more than capable of handling it. Once preparations are complete, we will move onto the actual mission, and first head to the storage village, which is the stopover on the way to our destination.”

“Um... what is a storage village?”

“Storage village is a general term. They are like relay stations built on the way to the magic tree fields. They serve as residences for those who manage the magic tree fields and the hunting adventurers who thin the monsters out, and also serve as a market where the harvest from the magic tree fields can be collected and traded. The difference between

them and villages and towns is that depending on the time of year, they may be almost deserted apart from the managers.”

《I see. If we're going to grow crops from the magic tree, there's no need to cultivate it.》

《Doesn’t it feel like a beach house?》

“Will there be people there when we get there?”

“Of course there will. That's why it's possible to do some simple resupply there. Then you'll head to your final destination, carry out your mission there, then return via the reverse route and complete the post-mission procedures. Then your mission will be complete. After that, your actions during the mission will be assessed, and if you pass, your training will end, if you fail, you'll receive supplementary training and move on to the next training session.”

“Approximately how long will the training last?”

“The duration is scheduled to be a maximum of fifteen days. With that, I will announce the party division.”

X X X

Seina's party consisted of eight people, including Leren, two girls, five boys, and the party leader. There were five other parties with roughly the same number of people each. Each group moved to a small conference room to start planning.

“Well, let me start by introducing myself. I'm Ganipa, a sub-team member belonging to the clan “Dark Green Stone Wall”, and I've been active for three years. I have experience as an apprentice team leader, so I've been asked by the guild to lead this party. Nice to meet you.”

Ganipa gave a small bow with a smile. As expected of someone who had been asked to be a leader, he had excellent communication skills and was a young man who exuded honesty and a sense of security. Some of the members seemed to recognize the clan’s name, and a small murmur arose.

《After all, a career is also necessary to increase credibility.》

《That's true. Airi-san is also a Philosopher and the Academy's President...》

《Don't tell everyone. Okay, I understand. I need a title.》

Regardless of her personality, Airi was competent at her job. She was not someone you could rely on in your private life, but at work.

“Now, please introduce yourselves.”

“I'm Donoba. Nice to meet you.”

He was taller than the leader, Ganipa, and was the most well-built.

“I'm Leren. Nice to meet you.”

Judging from what she said, Leren must have come from a farming family in the countryside. She was a little on the stocky side and had a tan, but she was pretty good looking. She'd look great with some makeup.

“I'm Mikuto.”

She was a slightly slender woman with a sleepy expression and a hunched posture, but there was something charming about her. As she was sitting next to Leren, it seemed they had either known each other for a while or had become good friends.

“I'm Cato. Nice to meet you.”

He was a little shorter than Seina, had a stocky, sumo-type build, and still had the appearance of a boy with a bit of innocence about him.

“I'm Radku.”

He was a short but muscular young man with broad shoulders and a strong tan.

“I-I'm Tom. Nice to meet you.”

He was thin and nervous, but also quite tanned. There were many students with distinctive tans among them, they were probably immigrants.

“I'm Seina. Nice to meet you.”

“So you're the guy everyone's talking about. That must be a lot of trouble.”

Ganipa's expression changed, and he gave a wry smile. As a leader, it was only natural that he would know the identities of the other members in advance.

“Ha, ha ..... Can you help me with that?”

“Sorry, but as far as I know there isn't any... it's common knowledge in this town that if you get tangled up in that thing, you have no choice but to give up.”

“You mean the whole town knows?”

Although conspicuous, this city was quite large. He could understand if it was related to hunting adventurers, but the fact that she was known in other areas was, well, as she said, “I'm a childhood friend and close associate of the lord. Even if he didn't say or do those things, he's still famous”.

The point was that her strange behavior was known in many places and many people were being inconvenienced by her.

“Well..... I guess that's a no-go.”

Since she had a daughter who felt even more uncomfortable than Seina, he couldn't be too selfish.

“It's not my place to say, but you're pretty easy going, aren't you?”

“I'm used to those kinds of people.”

“So that's just as the rumors say...”

“?”

“Oh, nothing. Back to the mission. It starts the day after tomorrow in the morning. Everyone is here, so I don't think there will be any problems with the schedule, right?”

Ganipa looked around as he said this, but no one objected. It may have seemed sudden, but as a registered hunting adventurer, all work was assigned through the guild. Therefore, by the time they took the test, any previous work commitments and personal matters should have been cleared.

“Tomorrow, we will meet here at the same time as today, each with our own equipment. We will prepare and buy supplies.”

“Um... I don't have my equipment yet.”

Some of the immigrants came here with nothing but the clothes on their backs. Some had just graduated from pitto hunting.

“You can get all the gear you need tomorrow when we go shopping. There are plenty of second-hand sets available, so you'll have everything you need in no time. In that case, you'll have to pay out of your own pocket, but if you meet certain standards, you can borrow from the guild without interest, so just speak to me later.”

At these words, several people nodded in relief.

“Then we will gather all the necessary items tomorrow, and after a brief training session, everyone will stay the night in the guild dorms and depart the next day. So far so good, right?”

Everyone nodded in response to Ganipa's question.

“Well, I'll explain our destination. We're going to the North No. 2 Market. It's commonly known as 'Cotton Fluff.'“

Ganipa began his explanation by pointing at a simple map with a stick.

“Markets don't have names, they're referred to by their approximate direction and a number. The name often comes from what kind of products are mainly sold there. For example, there are “spices” and “fruit” and even “potatoes” among them.”

“The potatoes from the Demon Tree are Earth Gold?”

“Is it possible to change the training location to there? If that's not possible, we could hold the next training there... that's not possible, is it?”

The first to respond were the two women, Mikuto and Leren. They seemed to be really interested. Ganipa seemed to know the reason and was smiling wryly, but the other men were a little put off by their enthusiasm.

“I understand your feelings, but unfortunately, that place is under the direct control of the lord, so there is a dedicated person there. If a problem occurs, a designated adventurer will be dispatched, so if you really want to, that's what you should aim for.”

“Ah... I see.”

The two women slumped their shoulders in disappointment.

《Do you know what Earth Gold is, Nayuta?》

《It's the underground stem of the same demonic tree as Proshetto, and is a general term for sweet-tasting things.》

《Maybe it's like a sweet potato?》

《I think that's what was used in the dessert at the restaurant yesterday.》

《Ah, that’s it! It was very delicious... I see, I can understand why the girls reacted so much.》

Seina recalled that the course meal included a dessert with a sweet bean paste filling similar to chestnut dumplings. There was also something similar to potato tempura. The sweet taste left a strong impression on her because it was something she had never felt on earth or in space.

《Your magical organ was reacting quite a bit, so that may be related. I've confirmed that it's not a narcotic. Normal sweets can be addictive too, so there shouldn't be a problem. I've tested it, but it's going to take some time.》

《I wonder if the reason it has an effect on magical organs is because it's made from materials related to the magic tree? Either way, if it's a high-quality item, you probably won't have many opportunities to eat it, so there's no need to rush.》

《Also, it seems like Seina didn't notice, but after Jobia finished her own portion, she looked at Seina's plate with a greedy look on her face. It looked like she was hoping to ask for yours if possible.》

《...I'm glad I didn't notice.》

If he had noticed Jobia's lustful gaze, he wouldn't have felt like eating it.

“Now, we will be training on foot to the Cotton Fluff Market. After making final adjustments at the market, we will move to our destination. You get the gist of it, right?”

Ganipa glanced at Seina and the others and continued speaking.

“Okay! Now let's move to the office and I'll show you how to complete the various procedures. Once that's done, we'll dismiss you.”

X X X

Even though it was called an office, the hunting adventurers who were the main force in securing resources numbered in the tens of thousands, including the pitto huntering children. This meant that the reception desk itself felt like a fairly large government office, and the floor level could change depending on the content of the request. It was physically impossible for everything to be handled at one reception desk, but with the advancement of so-called electronic magic using magic crystals and magic, the procedures themselves hade been greatly simplified.

《I wonder if this was also developed by Jobia?》

《There's a high possibility.》

With Ganipa explaining everything to them, the procedure was completed fairly quickly.

Some of them needed to pay in advance, so they moved again to the accounting department, which specialized in payments. As expected, there were armed guards and iron bars at the counter, so it felt quite secure. And perhaps as a precaution against robbery, the exit was a special passageway that was one-way only.

They withdrew the necessary amount at the counter, and their work for the day was done, everyone dispersed.

Chapter Seventeen: The Night Before

“Gahahaha! It seems like you messed up a lot during the lecture, kid. There's been quite a bit of talk about you in the guild, and several parties have already approached you.”

As they were eating dinner, Barigar seemed to be in a better mood than usual. It was night, so perhaps the alcohol also had an effect.

“Most of what went wrong was caused by Jobia-san.”

“Hahaha! But you could also say that it only got that bad because you're Jobia's favorite. Anyway, the party is still a long way off, but soon you'll be starting your training, right? When will it start?”

“ I know it's short notice, but we meet you tomorrow.”

“I see. In that case, I have something to give you later. I'll bring it to your room, so wait there.”

X X X

After Seina had finished his meal and was in his room doing his usual recharging of magical energy, Barigaru came in carrying his luggage.

“These contain the basic items you'll need for the time being. The one the boy had may have lost some of its magical power.”

With a thud, a large backpack and a leather jacket were placed on the table. From the sound of it, the backpack had some things inside, and the jacket was a heavy armor type.

“Thank you for your help as I was planning to collect them when I went shopping tomorrow. So, how much does this cost?”

There wasn't anything mechanical in the survival gear Seina had, but it was a blessing as the materials were made with space technology and some items may have deteriorated.

“Hahaha! This is already included in your debt.”

“Huh?”

“You need tools to make money. I've budgeted for the basics from the start. I'd also like to get rid of any items that are lying around in the warehouse.”

“I'd appreciate it if you don't make it sound too weird.....”

“Ha ha ha! It's not like I'm cursed or anything. When you're a blacksmith, you end up with a lot of stuff that people ask you to fix and then never come back for, or things you had to take in trade because they didn't have enough money. Well, this is one of those things.”

Barigaru began taking out the contents, perhaps to explain.

“Even though there are some flaws, it’s still a very good item. I think it’s the kind of luxury item that you rarely see in the shops that kid’s party leader will take you to, Gahahaha!”

“Well... if you're going to entrust your life to something, you'd better have something good.”

“That's right. First, let me explain. This backpack itself is waterproof, blade-proof, and fire-resistant. In some cases, it can even be used as a shield. It also has magic storage capabilities.”

“Eh? But wouldn't that be quite expensive?”

Seina had a spirit thread storage, so he wasn’t too happy about increasing his debt with unnecessary functions.

“This one is a defective item, so it's quite cheap. Also, about five years ago, a talented pervert started selling it at a relatively low price to hunting adventurers. At the same time, the prices of high-performance items were revised, so I'm discounting that amount as well.”

“Wasn’t that a problem?”

It was an act of hostility towards those who were making money from that technology.

“Some of the magic guilds were hesitant, but lighter and more compact luggage directly contributes to the safety of hunting adventurers, and the increased amount of materials collected is a good thing for both guilds. The lord mediated and negotiated, and as a result, it was allowed to be sold on the conditions that it be limited to a small amount and only to those approved by the guild.”

“Certainly, the more compact and light your luggage is, the less of a burden it is.”

“This bags owner was an old man who had requested some weapon maintenance, but he left his backpack with me and went to a brothel where he ended up dying of alcohol and women.”

“Well... I guess that's typical of a hunting adventurer.”

“Well, being such a playboy, naturally he had no wife or children, and all ties with his relatives are cut off. Since he spent all his money at the brothel, there was no one willing to take him in and pay the maintenance fees for this. So all I have left is the equipment that was left behind by that guy.”

“That's a pity, or... I don't know what to say.”

He really didn't know what to say.

“After all that carousing and being with about four girls, I guess even a guy who likes women won't have any regrets in the end, hahaha!”

“So, you're trying to collect the maintenance fee from me?”

“That's the discount. I put in some other weapons because you want to use them, but they're mid-level items. The storage magic enchantments enchanted into the magic crystals vary in price depending on what's added, so I've set the price at just the magic crystals I'm using to make it easier to understand. The rest are also the results of having an expert appraise them.”

“I see, that's helpful. So where is the grave of that person?”

If he was going to inherit the equipment, he should at least pray at the shrine. He don't want to be cursed in some strange way.

“Ah, it's the joint grave of the Hunting Adventurer Guild, but if you want to visit it, you should do so after you've finished your quest, because it will bring bad luck. In the first

place, he died because of a woman, so you should be especially careful, kid... but maybe it's too late now, hahaha!”

“Half of that is Barigarui's fault.”

“Gahahaha, I suppose so. So then... I'll register you in the magic crystal.”

Barigaru put his hands on his backpack.

“System Open”

As he said this, a magic circle appeared in front of backpach.

“You too, kid, just place your hand anywhere on your backpack and use it as if you are charging it with magic. Keep doing that until I say it's okay.”

“Yes.”

When he put his hand on it as Barigaru said, another magic circle appeared.

“That is the boy's biometric key. Relinquish ownership. Transfer rights to the target.”

Then the first magic circle disappeared, and only Seina's remained.

“If you lock down the system, it's yours.”

“System locked. System down.”

The magic circle changed shape, then disappeared.

“You can either touch the backpack and take out wherever you want, or you can stick your hand through the opening and think about what you want to take out. The list is automatically created, so it's okay if you forget, but it's a good idea to organize it every now and then without being too lazy. Now, try taking everything out so you can get used to how it works.”

As instructed by Barigaru, Seina began to take out the contents and place them on the table, but there was so much that the table wasn't enough and the items started spilling onto the floor. It looked like there were all kinds of weapons, survival gear, and camping equipment.

“All that's left is ..... Water. There's quite a lot of water in there.”

“Gahahaha! That guy was picky about the water he used to mix his food and alcohol. It's apparently a famous water from the Sea of Magic Trees. If you like it, keep aside some for everyday use.”

“I see... some of the equipment looks unfamiliar to me.”

What particularly caught Seina's attention were several metal cylinders of various sizes.

“Oh this one...”

First, Barigaru picked up a metal tube about 10 cm long.

“This is a terminal that is linked to the magic storage backpack. It's like a faucet that supplies and drains the stored water. Multiple devices can be registered, so if you register them you can have a variety of water...oh, that's right. I drank all the high-quality alcohol that guy put in it and replaced it with cheap alcohol to use for disinfection. If you want better alcohol, you can get it yourself, hahahaha.”

“If it's for disinfection, that would be more helpful.”

“And this guy...”

Barigaru put down the 10 cm metal cylinder and picked up a 30 cm cylinder instead. He twisted it lightly, and with a click a 20 cm section came off, revealing a blade resembling a dagger.

“This is a Blood Dagger.”

“The one that stabs monsters and sucks their blood.”

“That's right. Normally, you can't suck out the blood unless you kill the monster, but this one is different from the cheap rental ones, and can forcefully suck out the blood of up to a normal orc. However, there's a risk that it will go on a rampage and be taken away, so it's safer to only use it for collection after defeating it. The capacity it can suck out and store is about three goblins. Also, it's used in conjunction with a blood dagger...”

While still holding the blood dagger, he picked up a metal tube about five centimeters long with his other hand and attached it to the handle of the blood dagger.

“This separates the magic fluid and magic crystals from the blood stored in the Blood Dagger. After separation, the blood is released from the rear. Depending on the monster, the blood itself can be used for cooking, or as drinking water in emergencies, or as bait to lure aquatic monsters, so some people store it... but the normal thing to do is dig a hole and dispose of it.”

“There are a lot of useful things for collecting blood.”

“Monster blood is also an important resource. Without it, we'd have to go through the tedious process of draining and separating the blood. Although it's convenient, it does require recharging the magic crystals with magical energy... but that shouldn't be a problem for you kid. Don't forget to recharge it, okay?”

“I'll be careful.”

“Well, the jacket is customized for combat. Adjust it yourself as you see how it feels. That's about it. Is there anything else you don't understand?”

“No, I'm fine. Thank you.”

The rest of the items were of a different quality, but they were all things Seina had seen before.

“Well then, work hard and earn some money, hahaha!”

Saying that, Barigaru left the room. Seeing him leave, Seina returned his attention to the items lined up on the table.

“...Now, let's check our equipment again.”

《I'll make a backup of the magic crystals just in case.》

《Yes, please.》

Seina checked how to use the equipment he had spread out, carefully maintained it, and began storing it away in the backpack. Before he knew it, he was humming.

《Sounds fun, right?》

《Ah, this kind of preparation is really exciting.》

《Like before the field trip?》

《For me, I only have sad memories of field trips... But I had a lot of fun after we went up into space. This was one of them.》

The next morning, Seina finished his usual rotation and headed to the meeting place. His steps felt lighter than usual. He tried to stay calm, but his spirits were high.

“Good morning. Everyone is here on time.”

Ganipa, who arrived with his staff 30 minutes before the meeting time, was pleased that everyone was already there. The instructors would be grateful if there was no one who had been punctual. Seina had actually arrived an hour early, but everyone was there 10 minutes later, so everyone was highly motivated for the training.

“Well, first let's check everyone's equipment and luggage. Normally it's at your own risk, but this is training.”

Also, once they left on a mission, they couldn't buy more during the trip, so it was natural to be cautious.

“However, there will be a confidentiality agreement regarding your equipment and belongings, so we will ask you to agree to a contract magic. In return, we will make that contract, so please feel free to check it.”

Seina and the others took turns placing their hands on the magic circle that appeared on the plate brought by the staff member and taking the oath. Ganipa was silent, but the oath was basically a type where there were no penalties and you were given advance warnings about

the questions the other party might ask or what you yourself might say. If anything, it was for educational purposes, like what kinds of situations could lead to the leaking of secrets.

Ganipa checked each person's equipment and consumables in detail, giving detailed advice. Of course, he made a list of any shortages.

“Hmm, Seina's stuff is pretty nice. Perhaps from Barigaru?”

“It's a discounted item because it has a story behind it.”

“Seina probably decided that it's okay to have something like this... Yeah. Everyone should take a look for reference. It's a good example of equipment that can be used for solo action.”

The party members looked at Seina's equipment with interest, asking questions and taking notes. The questions were the same as Seina had done last night.

“It's good that you have a Blood Dagger. I have one too, so I don't have to pay for a spare one from the guild. Still, I'm jealous that you have Blood Cartridges... I couldn't afford them.”

“Does it cost a lot?”

To be honest, Seina was also an amateur when it came to value.

“It depends on the capacity, but it's at least as expensive as a Blood Dagger. You can rent it, but the deposit is higher than a Dagger.”

《The security deposit. That's a blind spot.》

You could find out the price by looking around the store, but you might not know the contract details. This was also information you could only get by asking someone with experience.

“Well, we probably won’t need to use them in this training, but just in case, let’s make a proper usage contract for the blood cartridges. And as for that backpack, we’ll also have a contract for a certain amount of capacity.”

“What? A contract for the capacity of your backpack?”

“That's the kind of contract a group of people make if they want to include shared items. It's the same idea as a porter's fee.”

“Oh, so you mean insurance for the luggage inside?” Mikuto said nonchalantly, but what she meant was that it was necessary to prevent someone from stealing it.

“Ouch!”

In response to the comment that cast doubt on Seina, Leren hastily pushed Mikuto, but she still has a puzzled look on her face, whether she meant no harm or didn't understand the meaning of what she said.

“If you put things away carelessly, it’s often hard to tell whether something is shared or personal, so if you make it shared and have multiple people check the list, there’s no chance of making a mistake.”

“Yes, of course you can share it.”

Seina smiled brightly, thanking Ganipa for his thoughtfulness.

“That covers most of the necessary checks. Next, I’ve prepared a list of what’s needed during the request, so please check it too.”

Ganipa began writing a list on the board: food, water, fuel.

“These are the general consumables needed for normal requests. Of course, there will be additional supplies depending on special requests. Then multiply this by the number of participants, the number of days needed, and the reserves... and you'll determine the amount to purchase. Food is basically distributed in equal amounts, but since each person has different food needs, the shortfall is adjusted by personal expenditures such as dried fruit. Well, in the Magic Tree Forest there are various ways to replenish supplies, but there are quite a few things that become poisonous if not processed, so don't resort to using them carelessly before I check them.”

“Looking at the total amount, it's quite a lot for a party to carry, but you're also considering restocking at the market at the relay point, right?”

“This time, we'll buy what we need here. Even if it's possible to get supplies at the relay points, it's not guaranteed. There may be things that are missing, or other adventurers who arrived earlier may have bought them and there may not be any left in stock.”

“In that case, I'd like to get a backpack like Seina's.”

“But still...”

It wasn’t easy to come by a backpack with magic storage. Ganipa took this opportunity to give a wide grin to Leren, who looked a little confused.

“In other towns, that concern would certainly be the case, but in this town, low-capacity bags the equivalent of two barrels are sold at affordable prices. Even those who have graduated from pitto hunting and are in the middle class and have saved up properly, can easily afford it.”

“Really?!”

This was one of Jobia's few achievements. Ganipa was proud of Leren and the others' surprised expressions.

“Yes. However, you need the guild's permission, so if you don't have a guarantor you'll need to build up a track record of requests. Of course, permission won't be granted to those who commit crimes or cause trouble, so be careful.”

“How much does it cost exactly?”

“That depends on the specifications of the exterior, so it's best to actually see it in the store. We’re going to our get supplies now, so we'll take a look while we’re there.”

X X X

Ganipa headed to a location directly below a retail market used by the general public. This area was like the back yard of the retail market, serving as a wholesale market where purchased goods were delivered, sorted, and traded by specialized dealers.

The basement was originally a quarry site, and was a large space with only pillars to prevent collapse. However, because it had been divided into sections and buildings built, it was complicated and in places resembled Old Kowloon City. Anyone who entered without knowing about it would definitely get lost, and in some places the guild was not in charge of security, and there had been cases of people going missing. However, the wholesale market that Ganipa showed them could be reached directly from the retail market above, so there was no need to worry about getting lost. However, there was a check at the entrance, so the general public could not enter.

“As of today, you guys are allowed to enter the market, so you should take a look around when you have time. This market has almost everything you need for the requested missions, and if you ask the shop staff they'll tell you all about it.”

There were many cheerful store clerks at the market, and many of them were female, making it easy for newcomers to ask questions.

“Now that I think about it, I've heard that there are some hidden spots that sell all sorts of rare items and bargains, and I'd like to go to those places too.”

Donoba said excitedly, perhaps because he had been chosen for this mission. After all, good equipment and special equipment were something people long for. In a way, it was like longing for a treasure hunt.

“Ah, so-called black markets... It's best to stay away from those kinds of places unless you're very confident in your discerning eye or have a trustworthy connection. In the first place, the goods they handle are quite expensive, so it's not a place you would normally have much use for. If you were to go, it'd be if you absolutely needed something that even this market doesn't have.”

It was clear from Ganipa's expression that the place didn't have a very good reputation.

“What if you need it?”

“The staff here are knowledgeable about that kind of information. First, you should visit frequently, purchase items regularly, and build trust. Once they understand your creditworthiness and financial situation, they will be willing to consult with you if you need assistance. However, to be honest, I have rarely heard of anyone in my circle doing business with them.”

Ganipa raised his hand to a veteran-looking store clerk and pointed to Seina and the others behind him. The clerk seemed to understand the reason and nodded with a smile.

“?”

At that moment, Seina's expression twitched.

《Nayuta checks our surroundings. Someone is watching.》

《Understood. I checked when we got here... about twenty people are looking at us. They're also spreading rumors related to Jobia.》

As expected of Nayuta, she showed her true colors; even though there were nearly a thousand people in the room, including store staff and shoppers, she responded instantly.

《There's clearly some malice mixed in there, it's disgusting.》

《Under these conditions, there are currently two individuals who fit the criteria. We will continue to track and monitor them.》

After hearing Nayuta's report, Seina returned his attention to Ganipa.

“First of all, we need to buy food. We usually use dried foods and nuts that are easy to carry, and baked bread, but...”

Ganipa's eyes are drawn to the bags of nuts and dried fruits of various kinds.

“In my hometown, we usually only have two or three types of dried fruits and nuts, but there are so many.”

“There are a lot of things I've never seen before.”

“Is this... perhaps one of those grown in the Field of Magic Trees?”

These were the opinions of the immigrants.

“Yeah, the variety of dried monster meat has increased, and baked bread comes in a variety of flavors. It's been about fifteen years since then, I think. The variety has increased, and many other convenient products have also appeared.”

Moving forward, there were large jars filled with cookies of various colors lined up. It looked like a typical candy store, but seeing customers sampling the cookies, they were probably just samples rather than for sale.

“As you can see, new flavors come out every year, so it's actually hard to decide which one to buy. Furthermore, packaging that protects them from moisture has been invented, and they're made to be quite soft, so you don't have to hold them in your mouth for a while or soak them in soup like you did in the past. There are also instant soups with meat and vegetables that you can make by dissolving them in hot water.”

《Hey, what is this...》

“That's amazing. But it's only been like this for about fifteen years... did something happen?”

“The person who is constantly involved with Seina in product development is involved.”

“She’s truly... talented and versatile.”

“That's one of the reasons why no one can complain about her behavior. Also, the widespread use of magic storage has had a big impact. Thanks to that, the variety, quality, and quantity of the harvest brought from the Sea of Magic Trees has increased dramatically.”

It must be the low-capacity magic storage he heard about from Barigaru. It made sense when he considered the effect it had on the scene unfolding before his eyes.

“I see... But even so, it must be hard to choose with so many varieties.”

The differences in shape, color, coating, and ingredients meant that even among portable foods, there were quite a few varieties available. They seemed like they wouldn't get boring, but it might be hard to decide where to start.

“There aren't many flavors that people will like or dislike, but this time I'll choose a safe one that I often use at home. If you're interested, they sell tasting sets, so there's no problem if you buy one at your own expense... Anyway, that's enough of a tour. Let's get buying.”

Ganipa bowed to the store clerk who had signaled to him earlier and headed to the reception desk at the back, where he submitted his list and the items were collected and delivered.

《Oh, so you got permission to come and visit.》

《It certainly would be a nuisance to drag a bunch of people around.》

After passing by the wide variety of ingredients and seasonings, they next went to the section for consumables and daily necessities. To put it simply, it was like a camping equipment section.

“For this training, all large living items will be rented from the guild, so if you have time, it would be good to have a look around.”

The first place Ganipa went to was the exhibition booth for set references. There, examples of camping equipment for solo and large groups were displayed, with the types and prices shown.

《There are quite a few types of tents alone.》

《I've looked at them from time to time, and they’re pretty functional.》

While Seina was asleep, Nayuta extended her spiritual threads here and there, seeing and hearing various things and gathering information. Of course, she also collected various materials. Of course, she did not enter places that were shielded or protected by confidential information such as other people's private lives or guilds or government offices.

《Nayuta... you were reaching out to here too?》

《Hehe, it's interesting. Magical energy alters and fixes the laws of physics, so depending on the substance, it can be a multi-functional material on par with space technology.》

There were tents that could be used in conjunction with magic to maintain their shape without pillars, bones, or hangings, as well as ones with insect repellent air conditioning and floating floorboards. Of course, they were quite expensive.

《The Sea of Magic Trees is quite warm and humid, so maybe this is a way to protect against that?》

《It rains a lot, and flat areas aren't always available. Besides, if you're going solo, you'll be in less danger if you're floating in the air.》

《Well, when I was lost I also got hung from a tree... I wonder if this is also the effect of Jovia-san?》

《There are people like Barigaru who have been into space, so I'm sure they have knowledge from there. Jovia seems to be indifferent to things that don't interest her. However, it's possible that she helped develop magical technology.》

Even if it wasn’t possible to bring in space technology as is, it was possible to convert that knowledge into magic. However, this was only possible if it could be properly transferred to the magic element system, so there was no doubt that Jovia and other people were involved in various developments.

《She really is just like Airi... does that mean Nayuta can do a lot more?》

《I have some prototypes. Hehe, if we increase Seina's magical powers, I think we can make something that's not much different from the space.》

It seemed that Seina's spiritual thread storage had become even more of a den of evil.

《...Well, in moderation.》

Despite what Nayuta said, Seina didn't dislike seeing things like this either. He looked at them together with the other trainees, chatting happily about all sorts of things.

《Even so, when you look at things like this, the difference in technology between those who can use magic and those who can't is huge. The top is space technology class, and the bottom is Earth's consumer goods class.》

It wasn’t something he noticed much in everyday life, but when he looked at these kinds of cutting-edge survival gadgets, he could really see the benefits of magical technology.

“From here on is the booth for personal equipment. First, let's start by shopping for those who don't have any equipment.”

“Ganipa-san, there's something I'd like to see...”

“Yeah, that's right... You're free to do as you please in this booth.”

As Ganipa said this, several people happily scattered in different directions. Each of them probably had something they wanted to buy or see.

“Sorry, but I would like you to come with me, Seina. Is that okay?”

“Yes, that’s fine.”

“Then let's go to the set sales area. It's the same as the daily necessities area we went to earlier, and beginners in particular can buy most of the things they need there. And...”

“And?”

“Well, you'll have to wait and see.”

At the far end of the booth was a place that was selling sets, as Ganipa said.

“Wow, that's a lot of stuff.”

There were rows of sample backpacks and equipment sets lined up. Even the lowest rank was priced at 500,000 yen, but considering the amount of money he'd earned from hunting pittos, it was well within his reach.

“Rather than thinking too much about it, it's better for beginners to buy a set here because the sets are carefully selected by veteran hunter adventurers and store clerks with their abundant knowledge and experience, so they are well-balanced, and most importantly, they only collect reliable items even if they are older models. Furthermore, you can customize them in various ways, so even if you have a trainer, there are actually quite a few cases where it's better to buy them here. In fact, there are many people who do this.”

“Really?”

“It's unfortunate, but there are many different types of leaders.”

Not everyone was necessarily competent.

“When you become a mid-level or veteran hunter, your hunting goals become more specialized, and you start to have a lot of quirks, so many people end up with very biased preferences. So it's best to start off with basic items, as this will give you a wider range of choices later on, and more importantly, you can get what you want right away.”

“Oh, I see.”

There were a fair number of basic equipment’s available from many manufacturers. Most importantly, there were many people who bought them, so there was a large stock. The big advantage of that was that they could be used immediately.

“It costs money to have it made specially for you, and if it's too special and the craftsman who makes it is no longer available, it will be difficult to find another, and even if you do find one, it will take time to reach an agreement, which will make it expensive. In the worst-case scenario, when the craftsman retires, the hunting adventurer will also retire, which is something I've heard of.”

“Ah, I see. So that's when you go to the black market.”

“Well, yes. However, getting involved with them is often a big gamble. As I said before, it's dangerous if you don't have enough knowledge. I would advise you to avoid getting involved as much as possible. Anyway, first of all, please choose which backpack you want.”

“...Even if you say so.”

There were thousands of possible customizations, including shape and number of pockets.

“First, choose based on the shape, color, material, and size. These kinds of items are meant to be used and adjusted, and you get used to them over the years. The price includes some adjustment fees. If the item isn't badly damaged, they'll even take the parts in for a trade-in, so even if you replace the whole thing, it won't cost as much as you think.”

“I see... then.”

X X X

The three people who were planning to purchase each chose something that caught their eye.

“Then I'll go inside and make some fine adjustments.”

The things shown here were merely samples, and the actual products were in the workshop at the back. Ganipa turned his attention to the store clerk and began following him as he walked further into the store.

“??”

Seina and the others followed Ganipa at his beckoning and entered a warehouse-like place in the back.

“Wow...”

Seina and the others' eyes were drawn to the five backpacks lined up on the display shelves at the back. Just like the one Seina had inherited, they were clearly not ordinary items at a glance.

Although they were well-used, they were well-maintained. They were all excellent products, and each one had traces of careful consideration. Even to the untrained eye, they were clearly high-quality items, and the people who had chosen the backpacks earlier sighed in surprise at the difference between the ones they had chosen and the ones the staff had selected.

“It's not uncommon for hunting adventurers to part with their tools, but the ones here were acquired when they retired, and were used on the front lines, so to speak. They are second-hand goods, but they were put together by veterans with a lot of ingenuity, and have been well-maintained, with expendable items replaced with new ones. Of course, they are equipped with magic storage.”

The trainees looked a little confused as the store clerk explained things to them.

“That.....”

The trainees didn't have any intention of buying them and didn't have the budget for them, so they didn't feel like being told about it.

“Normally, these items would be displayed in stores and go to people who are willing to pay that price, but some people want to choose who they give their equipment to. The items shown here are items that people have expressed a desire to give to those who want to become hunting adventurers.”

“In short, it's something we’re giving to you guys.”

“Eh? But...”

It was no wonder that Leren and the others were confused by the clerk's explanation and Ganipa's bombshell statement. At worst, it was an item that was on par with or even better than the top-end set they had seen outside. It was impossible not to be confused after seeing the price, which was on par with that of a luxury car.

“Of course, the prices are set so that our customers can afford them, so don't worry.”

“More than feeling relieved, I'm scared...”

“Of course, there are conditions to the transfer. First of all, this item cannot be considered an asset. Reselling or transferring it is prohibited unless it is a consumable item. If you wish to

part with it, you can only sell it for the price we bought it at, and you will not be able to remove the magic crystal and sell it. If you are okay with that...”

“““I'll take it!”””

The three of them said it at the same time without a moment's hesitation. Well, that was only natural.

《Oh, this is the same pattern as Seina's backpack.》

《I see. So that's what they meant when they said it's rare.》

“I’ll add a little more detail here. The exterior will be disguised with the common leather you all picked out earlier, and we’ll have you sign a non-disclosure agreement regarding all purchases made here. This is for your protection as well.”

“So that no one knows we have it?” The three of them said, looking at each other.

“So the thing I just picked out will be used as a disguise?”

In other words, what they chose outside earlier was a feint.

“Yeah, it's just the nature of things. You can't hide information about retirees, but it's best to keep secret who it was leaked to. This kind of information is known to a certain extent, so there's no need to be so paranoid, but there are still young people with bad behavior, and all kinds of troubles have actually occurred. Just because you're happy, don't go around boasting about it in a weird way.”

“Yes, sir.” The three of them nodded solemnly.

“Also, about this backpack, the truth is that it has already been decided who will receive what.”

“Huh?”

“The owner, who wanted to choose a partner, was watching the test the other day. After taking into consideration the backgrounds of the trainees he was interested in, he decided he wanted to give these to you guys.”

“We were... what criteria did you use to make their decision? Honestly, I have no idea why we were chosen...”

“Maybe it's about my hidden talent?”

“Maybe something that shines through?”

Well, they knew it was just a delusion. They were only half expecting it. Ganipa and the store clerk looked on with a smile.

“Hmm, those kinds of people tend to be eccentric...”

“In most cases it's just a feeling. Some people would rather let it go to you guys, or they might even bet on whether the person they gave it to will be successful.”

“I knew it was coming. ..... I would have liked to dream a little longer.”

“But I'm grateful that they chose me as the subject of their bet.”

“Well, I guess I'll just consider it lucky.”

Leren and her friends had returned to reality from their delusional world, but it was true that they had received some unexpected good fortune.

“Now, I'll tell you which backpacks were given to you.”

When Leren and the others' attention was completely turned towards the store clerk and then towards the backpack, Ganipa put his hand on Seina's shoulder and quietly moved away from the scene.

“So, Seina... I'm sorry to say this to you, but I want to conceal information about what they got...”

“Maybe he wants to draw attention to the backpack that Seina got.”

“Haha, another decoy.”

“I don't care. You want to draw attention to my backpack, don't you?”

“Hey, aren't you being a bit too perceptive? I haven't been told the details myself, but it seems like they've gathered quite a few good items this time, and it looks like it might cause some trouble.”

“That... in fact, it seems that they have been watching us ever since we came to inspect the market.”

“Seriously?”

Ganipa's voice was lower, and his expression was grim.

“I thought for sure they were customers, so I kept quiet, but at this stage I have confirmed six pursuers and two people who appear to be collaborators. They don’t seem to be planning anything at the moment, so I think they are just conducting surveillance and reconnaissance.”

When Seina showed him the video, Ganipa looked shocked.

“...are you really a newbie?”

“Well, as a hunting adventurer, that's true.”

“It's true that among the new hunter adventurers, there are some who have experience as soldiers elsewhere, so it's possible, but in that case, they'd be a bit older... No, I don't care about prying like that right now. So?”

To begin with, Seina had a wealth of combat experience. Even the Galaxy Federation's GP officials and the military were uneasy about his years of service and achievements, so it was no wonder that Ganipa felt the same way.

“The surveillance and collaborators that have been confirmed so far are the same as before. Assuming that the surveillance is related to the backpacks, I don't think they'll launch an attack here.”

“That's true. Sure, the backpacks have some value, but not enough to cause a fuss here to get it.”

“So I think I'll let him swim until I'm done shopping. What do you think?”

“Actually, there are several people monitoring this matter. We've been told to keep things as natural as possible, so rather than us acting carelessly, it would be best to gather information after we return to base. Can you continue monitoring?”

“Yes. Let's continue.”

Chapter Eighteen: Here too……?

Seina and Ganipa were sitting in a small conference room inside the Hunting Adventurer's Guild office, and across the table from them were a sullen-looking Jovia, Barigaru, and a man from the Chief of the Public Security Inspectorate.

“Sorry for calling you out so suddenly.”

“No, no, so, what do you want from us?”

Ganipa seemed quite nervous as he faced off against the bigwigs.

“It's about what you reported.”

“Is there a problem?”

After Seina and the others finished their shopping, they returned to their base, the conference room, where they confirmed that the surveillance had ended and contacted the guild's security department, the department investigating the backpack case.

After handing over Seina's investigation information, the two returned to the base and switched roles with the party members. They were conducting battle formation training when they received a summons.

“Actually, that problem has been solved. That's why I asked you to come to report the results.”

“What? So it's over?”

Ganipa was already nervous about being called by such a big shot, so this suddenness left him even more confused. Seina... well, he was used to it.

“We've found out the full extent of the organization that was pursuing you. We've already arrested everyone.”

“Arrested? I'm glad to hear that.

Ganipa glanced at Seina as he said this. It made sense that Seina’s extraordinary information led to solving the case.

“Of course, we need to continue to be careful with what we have obtained, but for the time being, we can consider it safe. Also, the data you submitted this time has been very useful, and it can be said that it has determined the progress of the investigation. Therefore, a reward has been offered to your party.”

“But that data...”

“The party’s actions themselves have been deemed to have been an effective decoy. The amount of the reward should be finalized by the time you return from your training, and it will be added to your compensation at that time.”

“I understand, thank you.”

“That's all for now, but Seina, I still have something to discuss so please stay behind.”

Ganipa felt a little guilty about piggybacking on Seina's success, but he was convinced by the chief's words and bowed before leaving. Of course, he also felt a strong desire to escape the tension of the situation as quickly as possible.

X X X

“.....”

“.....”

The chief inspector who had asked him to stay quickly retreated, leaving Seina facing a sullen-looking Jovia and a silent Barigaru.

“...So why was I left behind?”

Well, it was easier now that neither the chief inspector nor Ganipa were there. He didn't feel like being reserved with Jovia anymore, so it was only natural that he ended up being a bit rude.

“What's up with that, you idiot, Seinacchi! How dare you do something so outrageous to my daughter!”

“Hmm?”

Barigaru looked from Jovia to Seina with wide eyes, his face completely misunderstanding what was meant.

“Because that's what she wanted.”

Although Jovia's words are intentional and malicious, it would be a hassle to correct her every time, so Seina fought back.

“Hmmmm!”

Of course, it went without saying that Barigaru's misunderstanding deepened even further.

“He used to be a good, honest kid...”

“It's Jovia's fault.”

“...Hey, kid, what on earth are you talking about? You can't be...”

Since Jovia was in charge of the investigation, Barigaru had no intention of interfering more than necessary, but when the conversation suddenly turned into a lovers' quarrel, he could no longer stand it and demanded an explanation.

“I was forced to kneel on gravel for three hours because of Seinacchi’s strange advice to my daughter!”

“... Seiza? By seiza, do you mean the proper way to sit on a tatami mat?”

Barigaru, who had been going to that restaurant, knew what sitting seiza was.

“That’s right! She made me do it with my knees on the gravel.”

“And the boy taught her that?”

“Yeah! My shins look like golf balls!”

Hearing this, Barigaru quickly returned to normal and left the conversation. He had decided that getting involved would only wear him down, and that Jovia was being a fool as usual. By the way, he knew about golf because Jovia was the one who made it popular.

“I even suggested using crushed stones, so she went easy on you, your daughter.”

“Ha, crushed stone?! I'd be so upset if I was made to sit upright with something like that!”

“It's your own fault, Jovia.”

“Demon! Devil! You're a demon! I demand an apology and reparations for the damage you've done to me!”

“..... Actually, there was a plan to use an iron plate, but that was just ..... Hey?”

This was too much trouble, so he played his trump card. Jovia should know.

“Iron plate... That’s... What a thing you...”

As expected, Jovia's expression hardened. It was an expression of shock that he had never seen before.

“Well, it's up to your daughter to decide, so I'll talk to her about it next time.”

“Wait a second! No, I'm sorry. I said too much, no apology and no compensation!”

“So I’m not responsible for damaging anything, am I?”

He'd rather be the one to do it.

“That one... aaaaaaaaaaah! I get it, I get it! It's okay this time! So please, please just spare me the iron plate...”

“So why was I left here?”

Seina turned his attention to Barigaru, hoping for some decent answers.

“Hmm? Was that it?”

Barigaru glanced at Jovia, who had gone silent, and then began to speak.

“...I didn't tell the kid, but the guys who were trying to steal the backpacks had an underground organization connected to them.”

“Well, that's possible.”

“This town is booming compared to others, and a lot of immigrants are coming in from all over.”

Criminal gangs from other territories, spies for the lords, and so on.

“Those guys themselves are a problem, but there are also the agents that have been a problem for some time. The people who invade also need a base to operate in this city.”

“That is why they were caught this time, isn't it?”

Barigaru nodded slightly in response to Seina's question.

“This guy was quite hard to get hold of, but when we caught him, we found out he was from a long and distinguished family. We're still investigating how he got that way and when he was framed. But... well, you can tell us what you want from here on out. You're the one in charge of the investigation after all.”

And with a hint of irritation, Barigaru poked Jovia on the head.

“Ouch, Beard... well, the point is, Seina found him.”

“Did I interfere with your investigation?”

It was possible that she was keeping it a secret from the rest of the group.

“Well, there's something I just want to confirm.”

“Confirm?”

“The truth is, his actions were extremely careless. He hadn't been caught off guard up until now, but now he's come out into the open so carelessly that it's surprising.”

“Ah, I see... I guess it's just as you imagined, Jovia.”

“..... I knew it.”

In short, Jovia wanted to confirm whether this was the result of Seina's special ability.

“That's why I wanted to discuss our future cooperation in the investigation. Well, I can give you the details after you come back from your training, Seinacchi, but for now, it's been decided that a bounty will be offered in addition to the party's for your contribution in capturing the agent. And on top of that, I'd like to offer a reward for your cooperation in the investigation...”

Jovia turned at Barigaru, as if to confirm that she was willing to leave the negotiations to him.

“I don't mind cooperating, and I'll leave the matter of rewards to you, Barigaru.”

Since most of them were heading straight to Barigaru anyway, this would be more reliable than Seina negotiating.

“Yeah, I'll take it all and reduce your debt, gahahaha!”

Barigaru, who was originally called in for this conversation, finally laughed in his usual tone. It was only natural that he wanted to include a consolation prize for the extra strain on his nerves caused by Jovia.

“Well, it's fine since the one paying is a lecherous woman.”

Jovia answered optimistically, but it wasn't until later that she remembered that due to her repeated misdeeds, most of her income was now being controlled by that lecherous woman.

When Seina finished his talk and entered the conference room, Leren and the others were happily adjusting their new backpacks.

《Shiny first-year students?》

As Nayuta pointed out, they looked like elementary school kids excited about their new school bags. However, it was understandable that they would be excited about a highly functional backpack that they had acquired through a rare stroke of luck.

“It’s all coming together, isn’t it?”

Seina called out to Ganipa, who was watching from a short distance away.

“Hmm? Ah, good job. Well, the shell design was already done when I showed it to you, so once we decide on the material, it won't take that long. Anyway...”

Ganipa lowered his voice and approached Seina.

“The fact that she was there means that this incident must have caused quite a lot of trouble. To be honest, the atmosphere there made me feel like I was dying.”

“For the time being, it seems that the issue has been resolved, so you can assume that it won't cause any problems here.”

“That's great... and even better, that person was there too.”

“I owe him a great debt.”

“Ah, I see. The Chief of the Public Safety Inspector called for backup. That makes sense.”

“But the Chief of the Public Safety Inspector left quickly.”

“I guess he was afraid that she would defeat him. So he decided to talk to her directly before she complained.”

If Barigaru was going to complain after Jovia had beaten him to the punch, he might as well throw the negotiations out the window. In a way, it was dereliction of duty, but it's still better to have the accounting department complain than to have both parties complain.

X X X

Just as he finished chatting with Ganipa, the food and other items they ordered arrived all at once.

The delivery person brought a magic storage case with casters. The case had the guild's mark and number written on it.

“Please help me check the contents.”

One after another, items came out from the case's opening, and Seina and the others received them from Ganipa and began arranging them.

“Next is inspection. Please check that the contents match the package insert attached to the box.”

“It's quite a lot when you see it up close like this.”

It was about the equivalent of thirty normal cardboard boxes. Of course, this included the equipment borrowed from the guild. However, water was not included, so that was added to the total.

“I asked for a few more carriages this time, including some spares, but it’s still not enough. When we go on an expedition with a clan, we end up with dozens of large carriages.”

A simple calculation showed that a person needed two liters of water per day. If they added in about three and a half kilograms of food, this mission would last up to fifteen days, and the total weight of supplies needed would be about fifty-two and a half kilograms. If they also added in ten kilograms of weapons and equipment, that came to about sixty-two and a half kilograms of supplies. Food and water became lighter as they were consumed, but if the goal was to gather materials, the journey there and back would be quite heavy. This time, there would be a relay point so the weight would not be that great, but that simple calculation showed how difficult it was to explore the Sea of Magic Trees. It was clear how much the Spirit Thread Storage and Magic Bag Storage, which reduced these weights to almost zero, would contribute to hunting and adventure activities.

“All items are as per the list and there is no damage...”

Once the contents had been checked, magic was activated from the case and a confirmation notice was be sent to confirm the package.

“Some people are too lazy to do this and just check the box, but in that case, you won't be compensated if there's a problem with the contents, so be careful. Of course, that could be a matter of life and death, so cutting corners like that is out of the question.”

Everyone nodded at Ganipa's serious words.

“Hmm. Now let's divide up the items that each of us will be carrying.”

Leren and the trainees that had purchased backpacks finished adjusting their equipment, and the other party members prepared their own backpacks and waited for their distribution.

“First of all, each person should carry three days' worth of water and preserved food. This is in case we get separated. Of course, if you use magical storage, you can carry more, but just remember that this is the bare minimum. This time is for training, so we'll go with the normal flow. In that case, we can borrow a magical carriage to transport the rest of our luggage to the relay point, and from there we'll likely find a porter to transport supplies to the farm fort from there to our destination in the Sea of Magic Trees, so if the timing is right we can hire one. However...”

Then, Ganipa turned back to Seina, who was carrying a backpack with a large storage capacity.

“However, we won't know for sure until we get there, so in that case we'll have to use Seina's backpack.”

《Isn't it dangerous for Seina to carry critical supplies?》

“By myself? Of course, I'm sure everything will fit in my backpack...”

Seina shared Nayuta's concerns, as there was a chance that he might end up stranded alone with all of their supplies.

“Of course, we won't let one person carry everything. Normally we split it up between three people, but I think it'll be okay with just Seina and me this time.”

Leren and the other three also had high-performance backpacks, but their functions were still kept secret, so it was decided at the time of purchase that even if they were used, they would only be low ranked in capacity, so they were ruled out. In any case, they weren't exploring an unexplored area, so it was decided that there would be very few sudden accidents that would cause the party to be separated, so they went with just the two of them.

“...Okay, that's it.”

Anyway, once the distribution of supplies was finished, the packing of the bags to be loaded onto the carriages was finished, and everyone had checked their equipment, and preparations for departure were complete.

“Next, we'll move the bags to the warehouse at the departure point. We'll be departing from there a lot from now on, so remember that.”

All the bags were packed into the carts they brought in earlier and headed to the departure and arrival area in the basement.

“Let's take a rather interesting passageway.”

Ganipa, with a grin on his face, headed for a room with a vertical hole in the wall.

《That's it, isn’t it?》

When he first saw it, he thought of the thing’s robots used when they launched attacks, or the things they used to move around in giant triangular towers. Basically, it was a slide.

《I don’t even want to think about who built it.》

“I'm going to count to 20 after the person ahead of me so that we don't bump into each other. First, go to .....”

“Ah! I'll go.” It was, surprisingly, Mikuto who said that cheerfully.

“Eh... Well, it's fine. There will be an assistant downstairs, so just listen to what they say.”

“I understand!”

With that, Mikuto fearlessly jumped into the hole.

“Then I'll go next.”

Following behind was Leren, who also dived into the hole as soon as she reached twenty.

“Normally, if it's your first time, you'd be a little hesitant...”

In this kind of attraction, women were often the more proactive ones. Perhaps because the girls had gotten there first, the remaining men seemed resigned to their fate. Even the timid-looking Tom jumped in surprisingly easily.

Finally, Seina and Ganipa jumped into the hole.

The slope was gentle at first, then it suddenly became steeper. The stones in the structure were very slippery, and there was almost no heat from friction. It was a very fast ride, just like a water slide.

It was quite a thrill to slide through almost complete darkness, and it was long.

--Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

The women were having fun, the inexperienced men were screaming, Seina was silent, and Ganipa was cheering. Each of them was screaming in a different way. Whatever it was, everyone got to experience an unexpected thrill.

X X X

“Wow! Who knew there was a place like this underground!”

All first-time visitors, including Seina, were impressed by the grandeur of the place. It was a huge dome with a cylindrical building several hundred meters in diameter in the center. It was difficult to believe that this was an underground facility.

“That's certainly the quickest way to get down here.”

The building was quite tall. It was about 100 meters below the guild.

“The climb up is going to be the hardest part.”

“There are several ways to get up, but you can use the stairs in the tower, or use the transporter circle if you can recharge your magic power. Another option is to wait for the baggage transporter circle to activate periodically and use it. There are other routes, but those are the three basic ones. You don't need to worry too much about it when you return from your mission, as you'll be taking a different route.”

Looking around, there were underground tunnels running north, south, east and west from the central building. Many carriages came through the tunnels, loading and unloading

baggage. Furthermore, on the perimeter, many horse-like animals were allowed to run around, eating food and drinking water.

“Is it okay to keep all those horses in one place?”

If animals of the same species were grouped together, they could turn into monsters. Seina asked Ganipa curiously.

“Those are slave horses. They've been turned into monsters, but they're controlled by enslaving them. However, it costs a fair amount of money to process the enslavement and buy the magic crystal equipment, so it seems like it's only profitable to use them as transport horses or war horses.”

“I see... but I don't see any foals or anything?”

“I've never seen one, but I hear they're trained in the Sea of Magic Trees.”

Giving the horses a sidelong glance, Ganipa and the trainees headed to a coin locker-like facility near the loading area. They got a numbered key from a staff member, put their bags in the locker with the same number, locked it, and then gave the key to the receptionist to finish.

“The lodgings for the drivers and workers are close by, so we'll stay there tonight.”

Further up around the perimeter where the horses were kept, there were windows with various signs up and lights filtering in.

“I'll warn you just in case, but don't wander around too much. There are some areas on the upper levels where public morals and security are a bit bad, after all.”

“The upper floors are located in an underground entertainment district, right?”

Surprisingly, Donoba, Radku, Cato, and even Tom, who was a bit timid, showed interest.

“You guys!” Mikuto glared at them with fierce eyes.

Donoba and the others looked away due to her intensity.

“That place is dangerous for those of you who don't know anything about it to step foot in. I often hear stories of newcomers going there out of curiosity, getting stripped of everything they own, getting covered in debt, and becoming slaves. But if you really have to go, it's probably safer to be taken by a senior or an adult acquaintance who is used to playing around. I'm not sure if I can call them relatively decent, but there are some places like that. But there's no doubt that there are debt traps everywhere, so I've decided never to go there.”

“Is that why it's so dangerous?”

“Once you lose all your savings...”

Tears welled up in the corners of Ganipa's eyes. It seemed he had already suffered some painful experiences.

“I see... that's scary.”

“I was lucky that I got away with that... but anyway, you guys, don't worry about that and focus on your mission tomorrow. If you cause any trouble or are late, you'll be disqualified from that point on. It could seriously ruin your future.”

The words of an experienced person carried weight. After firmly ingraining his point, Ganipa headed towards the outer passage and started walking.

“Then I'll show you to your accommodations.”

《Tomorrow is the day. Are you looking forward to it?》

《Of course. Anyway, Nayuta, please make sure there are no problems.》

《Of course.》

He'd completely forgotten about it recently, but when he was on Earth, these kinds of excursions were always fraught with obstacles, and it wasn't uncommon for him to be refused participation.

《At any rate, I hope nothing happens.》

Chapter Nineteen: Epilogue: Being too Competent can be a Problem

The main star of the Suirei Kingdom.

The King, Suiten Hiyouga Suire, was drinking with his wife Shisui in the observation deck on the top floor of his private residence. The two of them were alone, with only a small lamp on, spending some quiet time together.

“I've been closely monitoring the situation... but I never expected it to work out so well...”

“I see... it looks like the conditions will not be met. If that is the case, the birth of a new royal family is inevitable.”

Suiten listened to his wife Shisui's report and said quietly. “I can say that the current is still under control..... But the flow is too fast. We haven't even finished cleaning up yet.....”

“It's a little early to say, but the battle for the next generation is already in full swing. It is that princess who accelerated it. We just have to wait and see what happens. What about the other princesses?”

“We're trying to ..... to avoid bankruptcy.”

“I see.”

The two of them spent the rest of the day in silence, not speaking a word.

【Tenchi Muyo! GXP Volume 18・End】

Afterword

I'm truly sorry for keeping you waiting.

This volume was originally supposed to be released before the release of the OVA Jovia, but this was the first time I'd experienced such a terrible slump. After that, my main job was in an unavoidable situation... and I apologize again.

Well, after being delayed repeatedly due to work-related issues, I finally restarted, but there were many things I'd completely forgotten, so I had to reread the Renza Arc many times, create a character list, and so it took quite a bit of time to prepare.

So I resumed writing this volume, which I had left partially finished, but I made a big miscalculation... Jovia's character had been developed in many ways through the anime, and as a result, she ended up standing out more than we had expected, far more than we had anticipated, turning into a huge monster with a powerful presence.

So what happened was that the monster began to make its presence known and started appearing all over the place.

If she finds even the slightest opening, she comes out destroying it, destroying gaps here and there and increasing the number of pages. She just adds unnecessary hassle and takes over roles that were originally supposed to be played by someone else, this role, that role, and the other role. After all, the city is now Jovia's territory. She has taken root underground like the dokudami (**Houttuynia** cordata, Chameleon plant), and everything has become her sphere of activity, so it is impossible to eradicate, exterminate, or exorcise her.

Anyway, for Jovia, Seina is... so if she gets a bite, it's the end.

I tried my best to get to the point where I could discuss the plan, but no matter how much I wrote, I just couldn't finish. Before I knew it, I had quite a lot to write, so I finally gave up just before the training started.

However, as long as she doesn't go off the rails, Jovia is a very useful woman, so she will probably continue to show up here and there. I hope that in the next volume, she will be able to use her capable pervert side to make arrangements to go to the continent where Airen-san is...

Well, in this volume, Clay’s mother also appears. I never thought the day would come when she would actually appear... She has a big influence on the environment of Seina and the others, but she doesn't have much direct involvement. She's the kind of character who just appears there, drinks tea, and leaves, so if you see her, please wave to her.

Masaki Kajishima